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Perhaps the Westminster style of parliamentary democracy, with its archaic English customs, is hopelessly incompatible with the Bengali psyche. We are, after all, notoriously emotional, and prone to extremes of temperament. Unlike the House of Commons there is nothing constitutional about our "monarchy," and "Her Majesty's loyal opposition" is anything but loyal in post-colonial Bangladesh. The "right honourable" members are seldom right and almost never honourable, and their equally colourful rivals are the first to say so.

Perhaps, at the end of the day, we may yet evolve a system more in tune with our heartbeat so that we might fill with good and tangible goals the void of so many empty promises. Until then politics. as it is presently practiced, will continue to act like a wedge between the rulers and the ruled, and strike at the heart of the disinherited.

Whatever the reasons, the consequences are critical -- these are the roots of alienation. An entire generation, which has never known anything better than the grime of its miserable existence, is literally disenfranchised from any hope whatsoever. While a new age of the hierarchy of wealth reinstitutes the old class structure with renewed vigour.

The new morality of the newly ultra-modern is on a collision course with established conservatism and age-old poverty. Thus, the hunt for identity is the choice between the lure of the consumer culture, and the promise of clemency for all our crimes of passion, with just the pulling of a trigger. There is no middle path. The identity goals are crystal clear and uncompromising. The pressures are irresistible. Whichever way we package the agenda, whether in the emergence of the proletariat or in the resurgence of religion, the message is incendiary and unambiguous.

Some who have fought in Palestine, Afghanistan, and other frontiers of Jihad, have returned, bringing with them the scars of a foreign crusade, only to become misfits and lost souls in their own homeland. Such men will not easily surrender their convictions, simply to conform with countrymen who, in their eyes, have strayed from the true path. They will stand their ground. For them liberal democracy is a giveaway, a total sell-out.

After all, in a nation of nearly a hundred and fifty million, how many truly understand the meaning of such a long-winded word as secularism? Others have just stepped out of their villages, bombarded by satellite television and the spoils of party affiliation. These are the "secular" infidels, the corruptible "faithful." But both, however incompatible, share a common determination to demolish the status-quo and become the ultimate arbitrators of their own fate.

We can blame the failure of leadership, the dogmatic disciples; we can blame colonialism, the economic superpowers, globalization and the ubiquitous multi-nationals; we can blame our neighbours, the wolf at the door; we can blame religion and the war on terror; we can even blame democracy, but none will rush to our rescue, nor defuse the time bomb of our fortunes.

The sum total of all our fears is only the tip of the iceberg. The deciding battle for Bangladesh will be fought, not only between the haves and the have-nots, but between institutionalized beliefs and the open society, between the power of superstition and the freedom of individualism. It will wake the dead and challenge Bengali nationalism to the core. What manner of men we are, our emotional resources, our intellectual depth, our strength of character, the vastness of our magnanimity, will define the face of freedom -- or the mask of tyranny.

In the civil war of the soul, socialism and Islam have much more in common with each other than with any of the non-existent "philosophies" of the bickering political parties of Bangladesh. The al-Qaeda franchise, no less persuasive than Coca-Cola or McDonalds and other symbols of Western civilization, is by no means the exclusive marketing agent of "resurgent" Islam -- nor is the rise of the working class a sinister communist plot to discredit the efficacy of faith and establish a godless society. It is simply the inevitable triumph of humanity over bad masters. This fever will not be slaked. It is, after all, the fever of the soul. Our heroes, the pundits of political prophesy, should take heed lest they, too, are swept away by the very revolution they helped to ignite.

One is reminded of the words of an English historian: "In a darkness deepened by contrast with such radiance might be perceived a monarchy at once despotic and weak, a corrupt and worldly Church, a nobility growing increasingly parasitical, a bankrupt exchequer, an irritated bourgeoisie, an oppressed peasantry, financial, administrative, and economic anarchy, a nation strained and divided by misgovernment and mutual suspicion -- all the factors ... which lead a country to revolution."

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