THE POLITICS OF FANTASY

For the best part of a year this nation has withnessed a grotesque charade carried out in the name of religion. 100 million Muslims are being asked to believe that Islam is in danger. If people campaign for food or for the expropriation of ill-gotten wealth or if parties favour a constitution based on complete autonomy this is translated into a threat to the faith.

Had any such suggestion been made privately a person could have been committed for physchiatric care. But when political parties, spending lavishly, with the full support of the 'kept press, bases its whole electoral campaign on this political fantasy it is time to take notice.

In our 22 years we are for the first time being persuaded that Islam is in danger. In the two decades of corruption, jobbery, loot and ultimately naked dictatorship, no one suggested that Islam was in danger. Many argued that much was, un-Islamic and hence objectionable but no one dared to suggest that the faith was in peril. Suddenly we find Islam is fighting for its life assailed by enemies of diverse hue and that the faithful must mobilise behind the banners of Maulanas and Nawabzadas to preserve Islam in Pakistan.

And what is this threat? Socialism as preached by Mr. Bhutto and Bhashani? Any one with a modicum of political knowledge would see that Mr. Bhutto's affinity to scientific socialism as preached by Marx is more apparent than real. His own particular variant may or may not be Islamic in conception but wherein does it pose a threat to the faith? Will it abolish Ramzan, terminate Moharam, make prayers illegal? What precise threat does it pose to believers or their beliefs? And what of Maulana Bhashani, who today preaches a return to the *Khilafat-e-Rasheedeen* and uses Islam so lavishly that his party general secreatary and life long political disciple has just resigned from his party for fear that the Maulana is a threat to secularism?

Or is 6 points or Pakhtoonistan a threat to Islam? Does the demand for fiscal powers and monetary control by the province threaten the faith? As if by some irony income tax and one currency were to be left with the centre, two highly secular concepts, Islam would be preserved.

Or is the decision to change a tongue twister of a name like North West Frontier Province imposed by British Imperalism on the Pathans opening the doors to Satan?

Such politics is making Pakistan the laughing stock of the Muslim world: There we have kings, socialists, fascists tribal chieftains, colonels ruling Muslims from Jakarta to Casablanca. Whilst all affirm their faith in the eternal verities of the religion their regimes function on essentially secular lines. No one has suggested that for this presumption Islam is in danger in their country. Then why must the citizens of the second largest Muslim nation on earth be asked to fight a jehad against the infidel? What presumptions are ascriled to our politicians which have not been embraced in one form or another by the Pahelvis, Nasser, Sekou Toure of Guinea, Soekarno, Boumeddiene, Bourgiba, Hussain Talal, Hasan of Morocco, Keita of Mali or even Tunku Abdul Rahman? They may differ on policies, ideology and alignments but would anyone suggest that their attitude to religion is different amongst themselves or in comparison to our so called secular politicians?

To what end then is this hysteria being created in the name of Islam. No practising politician seriously believes that Islam is in any more danger today than it has been these last 22 or even 200 years. The answer is inevitably secular. Even Moulana's aspire after the secular goals of power and are not fussy about the means used. The others, the flotsam and jetsam of the Ayub raj who so cynically use the slogans of Islam, no one need take seriously. The more serious challenge comes from the so called theocratic parties, who are now front runners in the religious stakes. The others are merely their saddle bearers and consequently the more shrill. Whilst they spend lavishly and strengthen their appeal to the committed these parties now know that precious few seats are going to fall to them in the elections, notwithstanding their attempt to create mass neurosis. It is therefore not surprising that they should go in for these expensive demonstrations to create an illusion of crisis. By confronting all progressive forces they provide a life line to the privileged classes who in consequence finance them liberally. More serious, they aim at the faith of societies' defenders. There they aim to create a sufficient sense of alarm to awaken them to what they refer to as the threat to Pakistan's ideological frontiers. This appeal will go on throughout the campaign and during the phase of constitution making. Whilst their slogans are for democracy their goals are to frustrate it. To this end they are willing to encourage anti-democratic forces and hope to serve as ideologists to those who will wield power in future. Democratic forces had better take note of this threat and counter it before it is too late.


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