

# Beyond the Pendulum of the General and the Landlord-Politician: Understanding and Creating Alternative Futures for Pakistan

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In this essay, I outline five futures for Pakistan: (1) the Pendulum continues forever, (2) Collapse, (3) joining Chindia, (4) the Great Game, and (5) a South Asian Confederation. The most familiar and likely are based on the pendulum of rule by the military and rule by landlord/politicians. However, what is needed is to move from the more likely and less desirable futures to a process of anticipatory democracy where the citizens of Pakistan consider, create and commit to building their preferred future.

## Deep Structures

While the assassination of Benazir Bhutto certainly plunged Pakistan into one of its worst crises in decades, the recent successful elections (Hasan, 2008) appear to have brought hope back again. The extremist parties did poorly (Associated Press, 2880), and even with a low turn out and election violence, it appears that the latest cycle of military rule is over.

Yes, much remains unresolved. Certainly as Nathan Gardels argues in his article, "Bhutto's elimination a big boost for al-Qa'ida," (2008), the West did lose track of the prize, focusing on Iraq instead of on Islamabad. It is in Pakistan where the future of the Islamic world lies (Schwartz, 2008). In addition to the Afghanistan Taliban, there is now a Pakistani Taliban. Nuclearization continues. Civil society is still vulnerable to internal and external shocks. Can politicians create a secular democratic Pakistan? Or will the politics of Jihadism continue, with Kashmir returning as the battle front?

While these issues are important in understanding Pakistan's future, we often forget the deep archetypes and structures (inner symbols and external patterns) in Pakistani politics. These delimit what is possible.

Syed Abidi's Doctoral dissertation at the University of Hawaii, titled *Social Change and the Politics of Religion in Pakistan* (1999) made the observation that Pakistan's political system can best be understood as a pendulum between civilian rule and military rule.

The first stage was from 1947-1958 and was characterized by the Parliamentary system with the dominant class interest being the feudal land owners. The second stage was from 1958-1968. This was martial law with an American presidential system and saw the rise of the capitalist class. The third stage - from 1968-1977 - saw the end of Martial law (with a presidential and parliamentary system) and the beginning of the Bhutto era and the return of feudalism.

With the coup by General Zia in 1977, military rule returned and the capitalist class was back in power. The fourth stage had begun. This ended with his assassination in 1988.

The fifth stage was characterized by civilian rule (Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Shariff) until Pervez Musharraf conducted his own coup in 1999 and began the sixth stage. With the events of 9/11, globalization and the rise of the internet, this phase has seen the return of the capitalist class.

In 2008 the seventh stage of Pakistan's politics appears to have begun. The military era is about to end and the civilians will be back in power – either in the guise of Musharraf the democrat, the PPP, or Nawaz Shariff – or some power sharing formula. While the death of Benazir Bhutto is destabilizing, it does not challenge the deeper structure of Pakistan's politics. Pakistan thus swings back and forth between military and civilian rule one side and feudal and capitalist economies on the other. The archetypes are the general and politician/landlord.

But why has Pakistan been dominated by the poles of military and civilian power - and why the pendulum between these two poles? Noted political scientist and human rights advocate, Dr. C. Inayatullah in his classic *State and Democracy in Pakistan*<sup>1</sup> argues that one creates the conditions for the other: "As the military became more independent and powerful controlling national politics, its top brass developed an ideology and a set of perceptions to justify their political role. Politics was projected as an irrational, disorderly, inefficient and corrupt method of running the affairs of society compared with the rational, efficient, quick and clean way the military runs itself." (1997, p.137). They believe they were morally bound to overthrow politicians if the politicians threatened the independence of the nation or if they meddled in the internal affairs of the military. As guardians of the nation, they believe they have the right to rule the nation. Once the civilians come into power, feeling threatened by the military, they attempt to control them. As well, with their feudal roots, a pattern of patronage and corruption sets in. This invites protests from other political parties, often leading to violence. Eventually to stop the violence and decay – when there is weakness, public contempt of the political party – the military rise up and take over. Weaknesses emerge from various factors – internal politics, feudal politics, corruption, external threats with the particular causes changing historically.

Following Pitirim Sorokin's (1957), theory of social change, each system overreaches, becomes more corrupt, focuses on its own survival or makes long term decisions that may prove unpopular in domestic politics (peace in Kashmir, dismantling of

extremist Islam), and then the other group comes in. Both have created a pendulum that only benefits their own strategies and worldview.

## Archetypes

Moving away from structural analysis and towards archetypes, these two poles represent different selves of Pakistan. The first is orderly, rational and in control - the general. The second is land-based, social and can be chaotic. While it challenges military rule, it has its own structure of authority, even as it claims the story of people's power.

At the level of archetypes, the back and forth works because in this sense one is the 'British adult' and the second is the 'Indian adolescent' challenging British rule. However, and this is the key, once the political challenger takes over the mantle of power, he or she has been unable to escape the shadow of the general – thus, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto became authoritarian himself, as have others. They move quickly from the teenager challenging power and authority to the feudal lord. The landlord is also very male and foundationally hierarchical.

But there are two other roles in this field of power. What has stayed stable in Pakistani history is a third archetype – the bureaucrat in his suit and tie. The bureaucracy has remained strong throughout Pakistan's history, as it is the trusted and stable servant of the powerful adult. Thus the executive has prospered while other political institutions – courts, for example - and the rest of civil society have remained weak. When politicians have ruled, the system has remained tied to its feudal past, i.e. strong lines of hierarchy, strong patronage to supporters. Thus, the citizen as archetype has remained out of power - or expressed himself via chaotic power- while other structures have taken their places in power. The bureaucrat has been tied to red tape, using rules to privilege himself, instead of green tape, using rules to create a better and innovative society.

There are thus four positions – military rule, chaotic people's power that overthrows the ruler, the politician qua feudal lord, and the bureaucrat who ensures smooth transitions between all these types. Of course, it is arguable that political leaders have been far more democratic and the military creates the conditions for chaos (and thus justifies its dictatorial rule), since political rulers maintain their power through their feudal ties. Thus we see the dynastic nature of the PPP.

When the general stays too long, he invites the shadow self, equally violent. This is the *mujheddin* fighter, the *jihadist*, for example. They use military force but as power is asymmetrical, chaos works best for them. The jihadis do not need the bureaucrat; rather it is mullah who inspires them. Of course, if the extremists did come into power, then they, to implement their policies, would rely on the bureaucrats. The mullah, afraid that his story has become totally undervalued in the modernized and globalized world, instead of moving toward wisdom and creating a novel future, has returned to past caliphate glories. He links with the jihadist to take over the entire system.

Each one of these archetypes has two sides – the general can be protective and moral (the enlightened despot) or can be amoral, staying too long, clinging to power,

assaulting human rights and using religion or strategy to stay in power. The feudal lord can equally be protective or can stay too long, and use his or her power for personal gain. The citizen can be chaotic or can bring social capital to the nation.

## Alternative Futures

### What then are Pakistan's alternative futures? <sup>2</sup>

1. *The pendulum continues forever.* This would mean that after this particular civilian cycle, there will be another military coup in 7-10 years. Politicians will have some luck in ridding Pakistan of extremist fundamentalists, but old scores between the PPP and the Pakistan Muslim League or between the PPP and the military will still need to be settled. Issues of justice and revenge will continue and just as Pakistan's economy is about to take off, another crisis will set in. Citizens will rally but then when they see no real change will become despondent. "Nothing is possible here," or a similar catch-phrase will be the inner story. Globalization will not go away but the politics would swing between growth and equity.
2. *Collapse* – this is the most feared scenario for all, particularly in the West. Civil war in Pakistan (the provinces going their own way), the inability to stop jihadism, Al Qaeda or their friends finding some nukes, not to mention the global challenges of climate change, all lead to a slow decline destined for collapse. Kashmir as well will regain its focus in case the challenge from the Pakistani and Afghani Taliban is resolved. Capital flies away, economic development slows down and Pakistan becomes a nation of competing tribes. Women in this future are particularly vulnerable as the battle between religious and secularists throughout the Islamic (Arab influenced world) is fought over the "body" of the female. Is she a person unto herself or does the strong male (feudal lord, ruler, mullah) need to protect and control. In the collapse, chaos would reign. Over time, and perhaps even quite quickly, a strong military leader is likely to rise (the Napoleon scenario), but can the great leader unite all the tribes (the challenge facing Afghanistan today)?
3. *Joining Chindia.* With India likely to move into the ranks of the G-8 by 2020, gaining a permanent UN Security Council Position, Pakistan's only hope is to link in every possible way with India and China – or Chindia. Certainly Pakistan will favor the China part of the amazing rise, but in any case, in this future, economic growth is far more important than ideological struggles. To move in this direction, the Singapore or Malaysian model may be adopted. This model is characterized by a clear vision of the future, transparency; break up of the feudal system, limited democracy (One party rule) and creatively finding a niche role in the global economy, and then using that to springboard to becoming a global player. However, the India example shows that economic rise is possible outside the East Asian model. In any case, this future is hopeful but requires investment in infrastructure and a favoring of globalized capitalism. Instead of lamenting the colonial past, in this Chindia future, Pakistan creates its own transnational corporations. Politics moves from focusing on old

wrongs (Kashmir, for example) to desired futures. Instead of Chindia, Chindistan is created.<sup>3</sup>

4. The fourth scenario is *the Great Game*.<sup>4</sup> Pakistan remains a pawn, moved around for the strategic and ideological purposes of the great powers. Whether in proxy wars against the Russians or against 9/11 jihadis or whoever may be next, Pakistan's capacity to influence its future is low or non-existent. At best, it can only rent out its military, or territory, for others' battles. In this future (as in the current present), the rental receipts do not lead to even development – they merely enrich those getting the rent, generally the military. The national game becomes not how to transform the great game but how to get a piece of the action, legitimately or illegitimately. Those not part of the money game sing songs of grand conspiracies. These songs take away agency. While Pakistan has a dependency relationship with the rest of the world, citizens have a dependency – child/adult – relationship with the government, expecting it to solve each and every problem, without taking responsibility for their own actions and blaming the government when it fails. At the collective level, Pakistan remains rudderless, evoking the words of the founder, but unable to follow through with action.
5. *A wiser South-Asian confederation*.<sup>5</sup> The challenges Pakistan faces are similar to what other countries in the region face – religious extremism, climate change, poverty, corruption, deep inequity, used futures and less than helpful archetypes – the only way forward is towards an EU model of slow but inevitable integration. While this may seem too positive and far away, it is not impossible. Each country needs the help of others to solve their problems. None can go it alone, and each can learn from the Other. This requires learning, peace and mediation skills in all schools; moving toward the sustainability development agenda; developing agreements in security, water, and energy to begin with; and a focus on the desired future and not on past injustices. Gender equity and systemic and deep cultural levels is foundational for this future. This future also requires an archetype that is neither the male general nor feudal lord nor the rebellious teenager, but the wise person, perhaps the *Globo sapiens*.<sup>6</sup> Fortunately, the south Asian tradition is steeped with wisdom. Can this imagination be drawn on to create a different future? Already in Pakistan, there are hundreds of groups and thousands of individuals working on this vision. What is needed is systemic support for this future, and a move away from focusing on past injustices.

Moreover, can the mullah who is focused on religion for tribal power become the wise sage, the Sufi or *pir* focused on transformative power? Can other roles as well be transformed: can the consumer become the producer, the client the citizen, the child the adult? And perhaps, as in East Asia, can new myths be created through grounded realities such as the economic miracle, which has now created new stories of social capacity and new identities. Pakistan was on the verge of this future in the early 1960s, it is possible to rediscover this pathway.

## The Planetary Challenge

If an alternative future for Pakistan is not created, the pendulum will continue with collapse always being in the background. Moreover, in the world we now live in, a weakness or pathology in any part of the planetary system threatens us all. Pakistan's futures are part of the planet's futures – we all need to transform.

This transformation in Pakistan needs to be part of a multi-leveled futures visioning process – true citizen anticipatory democracy. Given the illiteracy in the nation, using television, radio, DVDs would be best. Possible scenarios of Pakistan's futures could be shown. Citizens could critique them and offer their own preferred futures (in some detail, not the grand ideas approach) as to how they wish their lives to look like in 2020 and what needs to be done today to move in that direction. Along with a citizen participatory process, a rigorous academic process needs to be undertaken. This would collect data; provide evidence of preferred, feared and alternative Pakistani futures. Finally, leaders would need to be consulted, helping provide inspiration. The process thus must move toward an anticipatory democracy that includes electoral and participatory democracy. If not, then foresight will be merely another activity of the planning commission or be part of military and political strategy. It will become part of the pendulum. Too much is at stake to allow the current trajectory to continue. An alternative future is needed, and, I believe, can be created.

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## Notes

1. Dr. Inayatullah is with the Council of Social Sciences, Islamabad Pakistan. Dr. Inayatullah <[uinayat@dsl.net.pk](mailto:uinayat@dsl.net.pk)>
2. See Sohail Inayatullah. (1992). Images of Pakistan's future. *Futures*, 24(9), 867-878. Also available at [www.metafuture.org](http://www.metafuture.org)
3. I am indebted to Clem Bezold for this term. Institute of Alternative Futures - <[cbezold@altfutures.com](mailto:cbezold@altfutures.com)>
4. I am indebted to Zeenia Satti at [zeenia\\_satti@yahoo.com](mailto:zeenia_satti@yahoo.com) for this scenario.
5. For earlier versions of this image, see Sohail Inayatullah, Guest Editor, *Futures*, Special Issue titled, "The Futures of South Asia", November 1992.
6. I am indebted to Patricia Kelly for this term. I also wish to thank Dr. Kelly for editing earlier drafts of this article. Thanks also to Clement Bezold for editing earlier drafts.

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