

Common features of Pak-Iranian Heritage: Political thought
7th/13th and 8th/14th centuries.

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The present paper will attempt to show the common conceptual basis of government in the regions of Pakistan and Iran during the 7th and 8th centuries of the Hijra era. Briefly we will highlight *What the people expected of their rulers? And what the rulers expected to do as rulers? To some extent we will also attempt to show what was to be done when there was a gap between the intentions of the rulers and the expectations of the people.* Western authors have made certain comments such as the “Western Panacea of self government possesses no attraction for the unsophisticated oriental”ⁱ and “The succession to the throne was usually effected by means of an irregular election ... and the person chosen to be Sultan was not necessarily a relative of his predecessor”ⁱⁱ. A Hindu authorityⁱⁱⁱ has suggested that the *Ulema* and *Umera* did not have the moral courage to control the Sultan. A perusal of the historical data shows that both classes could, and did, exert their influence, time and again, to control the Sultans at Delhi and elsewhere. Such generalizations and half-truths have created a very false impression of Muslim Political thought and practice. Not only was there a very logical and rational political paradigm in existence but the entire basis of thought rested on a humane and sympathetic structure of *Adl* and *ehsan*. Thus it has been pointed out that while, in the West, we are “struck by great ... struggles between the ruler and the ruled No such systematic antithesis existed ... in Eastern countries”^{iv}.

The Muslim political theory or attitude to politics evolved over centuries, adapting itself to the requirements of time and space. As the Sultanates emerged in the 5th/11th century, a variety of books appeared which the Sultans adopted as their touch stones for good governance. These dictated the “political theory” of state in addition to the standardized and declared dictates of *Sharah* and/or Muslim jurisprudence. By and large these works have a holistic approach to government and, as such, do not distinguish between administration and politics.

The government of the Muslims in the 7th/13th century was generally conducted throughout the Muslim world by Sultans. The origin of the term is Quranic and Arabic but the concept that they ruled under, especially in the eastern part of the Muslim world, was derived from the Sassanid

and Turkish traditions. Turkish tribal traditions and Iranian political concepts were amalgamated in Muslim law to adjust to the temperament of the Muslim society. The Turks too borrowed freely from the ideas of Iran and used, almost exclusively the language of Persia. The terms used for these Sultans included Shah, Amir and Imam. The political thinkers of the Muslims had clear views regarding the extent of the rights and privileges of the rulers and the ruled.

The people were required to entrust their affairs to the Imam who could act without consulting them to ensure government according to principles of religion as determined by authorities of Muslim law. The Imam was required to dispense justice and maintain law and order for the prosperity and security of the people. On the one hand he must collect taxes and on the other he must give stipends to the poor and the needy especially the widows and the orphans. He is not only liable to appoint officers for execution of state functions but he must ensure that they are honest and sincere and the Imam is to be held personally responsible for the misdemeanors of his employees on the day of judgment.^v If a proxy was required for the sultan the *vazir* or the *naib-i-ghaibat* filled the gap at the centre and the Malik/Khan/wali/Muqti in the subordinate units. The theorists believed that the Islamic system was eternal and was to be based on “justice on the part of the ruler and obedience on the part of the ruled”^{vi}. Perhaps the most important works on the theory of state written in the Seljuq period were the works of Nizam-ul-Mulk Tusi and Imam Ghazali. Their views determined to a great extent the code that was followed by all the Sultans.

Tusi who seems to be considerably influenced by Persian culture enumerates the monarchical traits that should be sought as: “comely appearance, a kindly disposition, integrity, manliness, bravery, horsemanship, knowledge” and skill in the use of many arms and several arts. In addition he endorses the need for compassion, strict adherence to promises, respect for the righteous and learned and the need to relieve people of oppression^{vii}. Ghazali also has a list of sixteen qualities which similarly include worldly qualities such as “perfect physique and literary taste” in addition to Islamic qualities^{viii}

Power and prosperity are deemed to be Divine gifts to be bestowed by God as he wills and the Amir who is endowed with them is free to enjoy them in this world but only within the limits of the Divine law failing which he may face rebellion in this world and is certain to face retribution in the next. In any event he will have to render account for his justice and the exercise of his

sovereign powers and will be called to book for the harm that has come to those entrusted to his care especially for entrusting his duty to others. The Sultan is to redress the wrongs done to his subjects by his officials. Officials who were granted the control of land had “no authority ... except to take from them -- and that with courtesy -- the due amount of revenue”^{ix}

The Sultan is also expected to hold court for the redress of wrongs.^x Here Tusi is quite specific that he is advocating a practice followed by Persian kings of the past. Ghazali on the other hand takes an Arab saying as the justification of similar advice when he says that ‘royal inaccessability’ is the most damaging thing for both the ruler and the ruled^{xi}. We may note here the similarity of ideas between oriental governments even before the advent of Islam and their essentially humane attitude to government.

Tusi is not too specific but Ghazali clearly uses the examples of the Iranian monarchs in the pre-Islamic period to show that these ideals had a place in Iranian polity in an earlier age as well. Ghazali is of the view that the universe will be desolate if the ruler is unwise or cruel. The Amir should be obeyed, followed and loved and, on his part, the Amir is, almost by definition, a person who awards justice.^{xii}

Muslim philosophers thus viewed the Amir/Sultan as the arbitrator between man as a social animal and man’s inclination to anarchy and self interest. It was not his task to eliminate self interest or to make the individual subservient to society but rather to strike a balance between the two aspects of human nature and to employ those individuals to achieve this social balance who could sensitively perceive and intelligently and diligently execute the administrative functions to achieve the delicate balance without becoming oppressors due to a surfeit of power. It was not enough that a sultan was just, he had also to ensure that “his slaves, troops, servants and officers” were also just^{xiii} The means for achieving this is “fear of God” which is more adequately expressed as “respect for God’s code” than simply a fear of retribution.

The Sultan was expected to uphold the religion in the tradition of the Khalifas, to administer their territory according to the ideals of the Persian Shahs and to control and lead the army in the style of the Turkish Qaans. The “piety of the people” it was contended “depends on the good character of the king”^{xiv}, in fact the subjects as well as functionaries of state were expected to model their character on the character of the ruler. The ruler was expected to be particularly

lenient with his subjects at the time of natural calamities and times of adversity when he must provide relief to his subjects.^{xv}

As regards the object of the existence of the rulers or the rationale for their creation, Tusi suggests that a “Divine Decree” is involved and Ghazali is of the opinion that God has assigned to rulers the task of preserving men from the injustice and tyranny of each other.^{xvi} It is opined that were the ruler to fail in administration or for that matter if there was no ruler human beings would destroy each other and humankind would be eliminated. The ruler owed his position neither to a divine theory of kingship nor to a social contract as such. The ruler was considered to have attained his position due to a “Divine Decree” but was to perform his functions according to a “Divine Contract” between him and God, and the subjects were required to be subservient so long as the ruler did not transgress the Divine Contract. If the ruler failed to deserve the Divine trust and socio-political responsibility he could be dethroned. And God was considered the Supreme Arbiter of who had violated the Divine Contract.

The concepts of government acknowledged by the Iranian theorists were advocated within the region of Pakistan as well. The general extent of the Persian influence may be judged from the fact that by the 7th/13th century, almost all the literature was produced in Persian. But this was not all. Not only did the rulers call for standard works on statecraft from Khurasan and Faras but the local literature produced similar views regarding the object of government and ideal conduct of monarchs, their functionaries and their subjects, of course with some local variations and some peculiarities of the faith or views of the individual.

The *Tarikh-i-Fakhr-ud-din Mubarakshah*, al-Marvarudi,^{xvii} considers that “the learned know” that

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It further goes on to elaborate the classes on whom the Sultan should bestow stipends and those who should benefit from the expenses of the public exchequer. The author further elaborates the public works worthy of the ruler. These include mosques, schools, bridges, wells, ribats, forts, roads, narrow places and those which create fear so that those Muslims who come and go for trade feel safe. He adds to this the example of Ardshir:

The next important source for the region of Pakistan was the *Taqat-i-Nasiri* which manifests its ideals of good government indirectly in the account of the individual Amirs^{xviii}. The ideal ruler is expected to behave like the model depicted by Tusi and Ghazali. The personalities of the different rulers are depicted in that light. Similarly for the form of administration and accounting etc. The Iranian model was followed. Haji Abd-ul-Hamid states c. 760 H. “be it known that whatsoever the scribes of Khorasan, Iraq, Ghaznin and Faras have written about it has been followed in practice for years”^{xix}

Another source of the same period, *Fatawa-i-jahandari*,^{xx} which is considered by some to be the comprehensive statement of the political theory of the Sultanate of Delhi is a prime example of the extensive similarity of views and identity of examples between the regions of Iran and Pakistan during that time.

Page 24 refers to the “wasaya-i-Jamshed” last of the Pishdadi kings, who is supposed to have provided inspiration for Mahmud of Ghaznin and was certainly considered worthy of being quoted by Barani despite the fact that Jamshed himself did not have a good end. Next the tradition is quoted of Shis and Kaimurs who were given the tasks of Prophethood and kingship respectively. In this regard [p.25] it is pointed out that “great errors are caused in judgments of kings owing to ... the increments of their own passions” and “the mistakes and errors of kings are not like those of other men, for owing to the errors of kings a whole world is turned upside down. This view is similar to As-Sahawi’s *Ilan*^{xxi} “Rulers and Amirs commit one of their greatest mistakes if they look at the policies of their predecessors, act accordingly but without considering the requirements of religious law The religious law is [the only] policy and not

the arbitrary actions and opinions of the rulers”. Barani freely uses the examples of Bazuchemehr and Ardushir Babikan.

On p.32 Barani notes that “Justice is a necessary condition of religion and religion is a necessary condition of justice.” Further that the king receives credit for all good acts committed during his reign because they are possible due to the justice of the king. He quotes [p.38] that according to Jamshed the “basis of kingship” was “plenty of soldiers and excess of justice and kindness”. Barani even goes so far as to rationalize the separate existence of code of conduct for kings on the Iranian model while ordinary men must follow the code of sunnat [p. 55] because it has been found that after the Prophet [SAW] ordinary kings could not maintain their dignity on the basis of simplicity and therefore government would suffer if they did not acquire the kingly dignities and follow the Iranian precedent. In this it seems that he had become over zealous.

The Zakhira-tul-Muluk gives a list of rights for the subjects and gives a set of rights for the Muslim subjects and a set of conditions for the non-Muslim subjects^{xxii} [perhaps because he was propagating his views in a Muslim minority area where Muslims were ruling]. This source also emphasizes the dual concept of *Adl-o-Ehsan* as a cardinal principle of government and identifies the likelihood of dire consequences for rulers who fail to take these principles into account because rulers are “custodians of Divine functions”. It even goes so far as to suggest that the ruler who attends to his domestic functions prior to his public duties is culpable for breach of trust^{xxiii}.

From the foregoing reconstruction, two aspects of the Muslim theory of government during the period under study are obvious:

- first, that there was a deep and inseparable link between the political thought of central Asia, the middle east and South Asia, and
 - second, that the concept of government was humane and considerate towards the subjects. Although the ruling class did enjoy the privileges of being the richer and more powerful, and as such dominant group, it was indeed true that “uneasy lies the head that wears the crown”. Thus the burden of the privileges was barely counterbalanced by their benefits. The

ruler was expected to bear the burden of the evils that befell his people in essentially the same ratio as he was allowed to reap the fruit of their labor and claim the credit of their virtues and successes.

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- ⁱ Stanley Lane-Poole, *Medieval India Under Muhammadan Rule*, Lahore, 1979, P.60.
- ⁱⁱ V. A. Smith, *Oxford History of India*, London, 1919, p.265.
- ⁱⁱⁱ R. C. Majumdar, et. Al., *An Advanced History of India*, London, 1960, p.391.
- ^{iv} H. K. Sherwani, *Early Muslim Political Thought and Administration*, Lahore, 1947.
- ^v Qamaruddin Khan, pp.25-40.
- ^{vi} Syed Kotob, *Social Justice in Islam*, tr., J. B. Hardie, Washington, 1953, p.91.
- ^{vii} Hubert Darke, tr., *Syosat Namah*, London, 1960, pp. 10-11.
- ^{viii} F. R. C. Bagley, tr., *Nasihah-ul-Muluk*, London, 1962, p.74.
- ^{ix} *Ibid.*, p.33f.
- ^x Darke, *Op. Cit.*, pp.9-14.
- ^{xi} Bagley, *Op. Cit.*, p.95.
- ^{xii} Bagley, *op. Cit.*, pp.45-47.
- ^{xiii} *Ibid.*, p.23.
- ^{xiv} *Ibid.*, p.60.
- ^{xv} *Ibid.*, p. 101.
- ^{xvi} *Ibid.*, p.45.
- ^{xvii} *Loc. Cit.*, ed. E. D. Ross, London, 1927, pp.10-17.
- ^{xviii} *Loc. Cit.*, tr. H. G. Raverty, Lahore, 1977, pp. 789, 805 & passim.
- ^{xix} Haji Abdul Hamid Muharrir Ghaznavi, *Dastur-ul-Albab fi 'Ilm il Hisab*, Tr. S. Abdur Rashid, Reprint *Medieval Indian Quarterly*, Vol. I, Nos. 3 & 4, (Bombay), p.18.
- ^{xx} Zia-ud-din Barani, *Fatawa-i-Jahandari*, tr. Dr. Afsar Begum, *Medieval Indian Quarterly*.
- ^{xxi} Extract given by S. M. Jaffar, *History of history*, Vol. I: *What is History*, Peshawar, 1961.
- ^{xxii} Sayyid Ali Ibn Shihab Hamadani, *Zakira-tul-Muluk*, Text, Amritsar, 1905, p. 110ff.
- ^{xxiii} *Ibid.*, p.91.