



Colonialism's Modern Form is the Secular State

In Afghanistan right before our eyes, if you were born in the late 70s, the 80s or early 90s, and reached political consciousness and awareness in early 2000s, we are witnessing what is considered classical colonialism in its modern shape, the secular state. It is this lesson, rather living through the experience of witnessing colonialism from its birth till its maturity, that may illuminate how we should approach and discuss politics in the Muslim World including Pakistan.

In a testimony to the US Senate Armed Services Committee on Thursday, 4th May 2017, General Raymond Thomas, Commander of US Special Operations Command, when pushed by Senator John McCain said: “he believed the critical factor in Afghanistan was the US commitment to “a sound enduring state” there, which he said, was “not described effectively” in the past. “I think our new strategy is going to establish that definition,” he added”.

This is how colonialism secured its place and developed roots in the Muslim World. Through brute military force it occupied Muslim lands and removed the previous model of governance whether it be the Khilafah in the Middle East and much of the Muslim World, Muslim rule under the Mughals in the subcontinent or in the case of Afghanistan a hybrid of modern secular state and traditional orthodoxy based on religious and tribal traditions. And in its place the Western colonialists placed a new state, the secular state, fashioned in Western traditions, developed based on Western historical and political experience and designed to implement the Western way of life and develop Western civilization in areas under its authority.

This modern state was imported and unnatural and hence initially needed military, economic and political support from Western colonialists as General Thomas is suggesting should be the case in Afghanistan, it being only 16 years old. To develop the roots of the new state, the West developed a “Brown European class” when Muslim lands were still under her physical occupation. These were men and women from local areas where the new state was to be implanted and who were schooled in Western civilization and ideology to the extent that they developed a certain conviction or a relationship of trust based on what they perceive as the charisma of Western civilization. It is from these men and women that the West handpicked or encouraged the development of the new ruling, political, economic and intellectual elite for the new state.

It was this new ruling class which was supposed to give roots to the new state in the areas where it was introduced by creating public opinion for the new governance principles of the state, the new ideology on which the state was built and the new policies which the new state was going to implement which were naturally going to support colonial interests. The West was content with certain elements of the new ruling elite occasionally espousing anti-Western sentiments and even short term anti-Western goals. For never could a ruling elite schooled in Western ideals, believing in Western civilization and governance principles and using the Western secular state as its modus operandi, can actually threaten Western interests in any meaningful way. Thus the new modern form of colonialism was born. The Secular State.

In Afghanistan, the hand of the colonialist is visible. The military presence of US is visible. US economic aid to the new Afghan state is visible. And statements of officials of Western colonial states supporting their colonial project are visible. In Pakistan the secular state is 70 years old. And hence the historical role of colonialists in shaping this state is forgotten or not that prominent. But colonialism lives on in the shape of the secular state, its institutions and the secular ruling elite.

No change will come to Pakistan neither through the verdicts of secular institutions like the Supreme Court nor through the aggressive populism of military Generals or opposition Politicians. For neither seek to destroy and replace the secular state. Afghanistan reminds us of how colonialists control our daily lives through this secular state. For meaningful change to come in our lives, politics in Pakistan and the Muslim World must therefore adopt a radical shift to rejection of the secular state and adoption of a state based on our very own ideals, history and civilization, the Khilafah on the methodology of the Prophethood (saw).

﴿إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ لِتَحْكُمَ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ بِمَا أَرَاكَ اللَّهُ﴾

“Surely, We have sent down to you (O Muhammad ﷺ) the Book (this Qur'an) in truth that you might judge between men by that which Allah has shown you” [Al-Nisa:105]

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