How the Pakistani Liberals View the Fall of the Berlin Wall

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Germany has always fascinated the Asians - unfortunately often for wrong reasons. Most of Asia, including the Indian sub-continent, was colonized by the British for a long time. Any developments, whether domestic or external, that hurt the colonial power thus was lauded in the colonies.

The Second World War was one such major development; many from British India fought on the side of the Allied Powers, but there is little doubt that the economic downfall of the colonial powers during and after the War led to the liberation of one colony after another, both in Asia and then in Africa.

This attraction towards Germany continued even after the War; and people were thus saddened when the country was divided into East and West Germany. The erection of the Berlin Wall by the German Democratic Republic (GDR) completely encircling West Berlin, and separating it from East Germany, was therefore disturbing to the South Asians.

During the Cold War, India closely allied with the Soviet Union, perhaps as a reaction to Pakistan joining the Western Alliance, including CENTO and SEATO, and partly due to the inclination of the first Indian premier towards socialism; he remained at the helm of affairs until his death in 1964.

As opposed to this, the people of Pakistan were in a strange situation. The military ruled the country from 1958 to 1971, and then from 1977 to 1988. It has traditionally been pro-western; and resultantly the elite, including the business class, senior bureaucrats and the armed forces' generals, always looked to the West for salvation and inspiration. The common man, however, remained split in opposition to the Soviet Union on religious grounds as communism reflected an atheist ideology, but at the same time loved the Chinese due to its constant support for Pakistan in its dispute with India. The American involvement in the Vietnam War also turned the youth against capitalism, and socialism attracted a sizeable section of the population which can partly explain the land-slide victory of the Awami League in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and People's Party in West Pakistan (which now constitutes Pakistan) in the first ever elections held in 1970. The government and the ruling elite, nevertheless, always remained pro-West.

However, the charm of communism gradually started to erode in both Bangladesh and Pakistan when people started to experience the follies of this ideology in the seventies. The worldwide phenomenon of people desiring to leave communist countries was for all to see. Here was an ideology which took pride in the Dictatorship of the Proletariat but which had to construct a wall to stop its citizens from emigrating.

The Berlin Wall was thus seen by the majority as the manifestation of the Iron Curtain. During its existence from 1961 to 1989, the Wall stopped almost all such emigration. The Wall was artificial, and had to fall. President Reagan was criticized for his 1987 speech when he asked his Soviet counterpart to work with him to demolish the war.

The subsequent developments however surprised everybody, including President Reagan. A low-key announcement by a GDR politician led to a wave which eventually could not be controlled through guns. This showed that the yearning for freedom knows no limits; and freedom and democracy eventually triumphs, even if after a long wait.

The people of Pakistan, despite being independent now for 62 years, still yearn for freedom, democracy and rule of law. The struggle however continues, and the fall of the Berlin Wall gives them hope.

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