

Vision 2030 – Haris Gazdar

Towards a Just and Sustainable Society in 2030

The concept of citizenship has to be a starting point for defining and envisioning relations between the members of a political community - be it real or imagined. When we are asked to reflect upon a Vision for Pakistan in 2030 the suggestion surely is that we are considering, first and foremost, that part of humanity that is recognized by everyone in the world as being Pakistani. So, it is a given that people are the starting point, and that the people in question are those that are deemed to be members of a political community or collectivity identified by a state.

It is possible, of course, to consider other forms of community – that is other than the political community defined with reference to a state. There is a concept of the Ummah, for example, that transcends state boundaries, and does not really have a formal political expression - the OIC notwithstanding. Then there are other actual or possible forms of collectivity – say people speaking the same language, people sharing similar tastes and interests, or indeed values. The market itself is a form of a collectivity that might not require very much commonality among its constituents except that they abide by certain shared rules. Feminists point out that gender is a collectivity - and that women have shared experiences of oppression and resistance across states, cultures and religions. Then there are powerful economic interests that cut across state and cultural boundaries – interests both of capital and labour.

In the presence of all these collectivities, and real and possible communities, I interpret the invitation to think about a Vision for Pakistan – or any other state for that matter – as a signal that it is the state-citizen relationship, and what amounts to the same thing, the citizen-citizen relationship that is being privileged. Not that other forms of community such as those mentioned above do not matter, or are not important. But these other forms of community are to be seen through a prism of the state-citizen relationship. In fact, as it will be argued below, these other forms of community or collectivity will ultimately shape and provide content to the state-citizen relationship.

There is practical value, therefore, of the concept of citizenship if we start thinking about visions. Whose vision, thought by whom, and for what purpose? Whose Pakistan and which Pakistanis? The Seraiki-speaking mother who picks cotton for a living, and goes to her *peer*'s shrine for spiritual uplift? Or the Urdu-speaking doctor whose family was not “modern” enough to get his children admitted into Karachi’s elite school, who thinks that praying at the graveside is heretical? Or the Makrani seafarer who spends his hours of relaxation watching Indian movies and has little time for rituals or “heresies”? All of these people are members of different ethnic, religious and economic communities.

What binds them together, however, whether they like it or not, is that the world recognizes them as belonging to a polity called Pakistan. They share the bond of citizenship, sometimes without ever knowing it, reflecting upon it, or being conscious of how it might impose itself on their daily lives. But how else are we to think about a vision for Pakistan, if not with the reference point of citizenship. There are just too many of us, and all of us with different interests, inclinations, habits, and tastes.

A short-cut that is often used is to dispense with the messy business of difference and to deal directly with “the state”. Pakistan is a state, and like all other states in the world today, it is a supra organisation that constitutes numerous other inter-locking organisations and institutions. It has a history, an ideological bearing, and relations with other states and international bodies. The “state” is often posited as an autonomous, if not all-encompassing, entity with its own personality, inclinations and preferences. But this approach, while it has limited merit in some fields, is not entirely forthright about its politics. Such an approach necessarily favours a status quo view of how the state’s interests get defined, because it often takes for granted that a singular personality already exists. Thus, we might have assertions that “Pakistan demands X”, or “Pakistan believes Y”. Such personalisation of the state might be forgiven as linguistic abbreviation at best – it is no substitute for engaging with the politics of policy-making.

In fact, there are simply no short-cuts to dealing with multiple interests and collectivities, and we must refer back to a concept such as citizenship as a starting point. I might add that the emphasis on citizenship is not the same as that old war-horse – the “Pakistani nation”. No, it is a far more concrete political reality. The “Pakistani nation” is often conveniently carted out whenever there is any hint of dissent, or a suggestion that there might be more than one interest in the state, or that there might be more than one way of looking ahead. We have been told on many occasions that we have to stop being what we are, abandon our identities, our class interests, our ideological inclinations, and to only refer to ourselves as Pakistanis.

I have no time for such exhortations. These are either naively mistaken hopes, or cynical attempts at silencing dissent. Some of those who loudly proclaim the need to submerge all other identities within an encompassing Pakistani national identity can be found pursuing their own narrow individual or group interests with equal vigour. I am interested in citizenship and not nationhood. Because citizenship is about defining the status of an individual, her mutual relations with other individuals, and her rights and obligations vis-à-vis society formalized in terms of the state. It is a profoundly political concept, and one whose parameters once agreed set the course for future political, social and economic interaction. It is a concept without the treatment of which it is impossible to say what a just and sustainable society might be.

Putting it very blandly, and in a passive sort of way, citizenship is a legal outcome. Those individuals who fulfil certain criteria of birth, migration and naturalization, or descent, can

and do become citizens of Pakistan. If their circumstances so require they can establish legal proof of their citizenship status by submitting to certain administrative processes. Citizens bear documentary proof of citizenship in the shape of identity cards, attested affidavits, and passports. They have certain privileges and protections under the law, and certain political and economic entitlements under the constitutions.

In a more philosophical sense, however, citizens are the very foundation of the state. Citizens exercise sovereignty (even if they acknowledge that it truthfully belongs to a Higher Being), they agree on the constitution, and frame laws whereby the state and government are to be run. It is a quirk of institution-building that while the constitution of the state gives formal expression to citizenship, the constitution itself must pretend to be subsequent to citizenship. A clever trick is to refer to the pre-constitution entity as “we, the people”, but that is merely a play on words, for it amounts to the same thing.

But both the mundane (such as the acquisition of an identity card) and the philosophical (being the precursor to the constitution and the state) notions of citizenship are relatively passive ones. Citizenship, in fact, cannot be taken for granted. It needs to constantly evolve with the times, and it requires a great deal of social, political and economic investment, to remain alive and viable. What it means to be a citizen in 2006 is already very different from what it meant to be a citizen in 1917, or in 1947, and 2030 holds up new challenges and opportunities of its own. These changes come about because of political, social and economic evolution both within Pakistan and in the rest of the world.

The concept of citizenship underwent important changes worldwide in the post-1945 period. The state was acknowledged in national political systems as well as in international conventions as being responsible for the economic and social well-being of its citizens. The state-citizen relationship of a “social contract” was extended far beyond the original meaning of its 18th century authors to include not just universal franchise, and equality before the law, but also universal education, health care, social security and protection from poverty. Not that things improved for people everywhere, but the idea of citizenship had evolved from a passive one to one that required public action.

In Pakistan, however, the ruling classes focused on some of the attended requirements of this profound change – they thought there should be economic development – but entirely ignored the social and political basis on which models of economic development had evolved elsewhere. Citizenship was to remain a passive residual concept – confined to the peripheries of procedure. Nothing needed to be done to nurture the notion of a citizenship based community, or a universal polity, because it was too messy and contentious. The first national conference on education in 1947 collapsed because its organizers were unwilling to have a frank and open debate about the ethnic diversity of Pakistan. For rulers who were schooled in the “subject” model of the British imperial state, it is expedient to carry on in the old way.

Today while we acknowledge the importance of goals such as universal education, health provision, women's empowerment, and poverty reduction, we often do so grudgingly or simply to fall in line with the prevailing international demands – such as those of the MDGs. The idea that you need to invest in people so that you might create citizens, is still far less popular in our policy discourse than need to invest in people to expand exports. And the world had changed in the meanwhile.

It is no longer fashionable for states to do anything let alone invest in citizenship. In 2030 the original rationale for the state – i.e. as protector of territory – might have disappeared altogether. This does not mean that states will dissolve. But it does mean that what has been regarded in Pakistan as residual tasks of government – i.e. civil peace, law, and justice, let alone education, health, water supply, and social protection – will increasingly be seen as the rationale for the state. Pakistan will have no choice but to adjust to this new reality. It will have to say goodbye to the 19th century and hello to the 21st all at the same time.

Who is ready for it? And what needs to be done? It is a mistake to believe, in my opinion, that pursuing particular social indicator targets – even if they have been sanctified by the international community under MDGs – will do the trick. Not that I have anything against setting and achieving quantitative goals. Quantitative verification is quite often a deeply democratic and equalizing act. But a qualitative analysis of why Pakistan has failed – and there is really no point debating the veracity of this judgement – is far more important.

What will be a society worth looking forward to? It will be a country where people are happy being citizens and proud of what society does for them and what they do for it. They will be self-conscious members of a political community that guarantees basic economic entitlements and promotes ever-expanding social attainments. It is not about winning cricket matches or exploding atom bombs, but about feeling that your identity and self find expression in highest organs of the state. It will be a place where relations between state and citizens are mediated by negotiation and persuasion and not immediately by violence. What to speak of citizens and state, relations between the rich and the poor, the landowning and the landless, between men and women, and adults and children, will be premised on respect and the acceptance of their mutual humanity. It will be a time when all children are in school and are taught in their mother tongues, and also learn other national and international languages. And people will not be persecuted for their beliefs or disbeliefs.

This vision seems uncontroversial enough – perhaps even inane – from a distance. Who could disagree with a notion of citizenship that is based on the acceptance of our shared humanity, of the right to language, or private belief, or the pursuit of ever-expanding social attainments? Aren't we familiar enough with this benign language? Doesn't every seminar begin and end with a repetition of these apparently harmless homilies? In fact, despite appearances, I very much doubt if we can take the notion of citizenship as an agreed starting point in Pakistan. If citizenship is a starting point for all manner of political

interaction between individuals and collectivities, it is not clear to me if we are at that starting point yet. I say this not for dramatic purposes, but for very practical considerations. There are at least five distinct, though at times overlapping, areas where a prior notion of citizenship remains challenged in everyday discourse in Pakistan. And while Pakistan is not alone among states in the world in this regard, it is important to be specific.

First, society is deeply patriarchal to the point where one is forced to wonder whether men and women belong to the same species. It is possible in Pakistan for a minister to say in parliament – the highest sovereign body of citizens – that it is alright to beat a woman as long as this is done lightly. Where else does mutual respect begin if not with the acceptance of a person's bodily integrity? An even higher state official thought that Pakistani women were getting raped in order to get visas to foreign lands. At the far end of the intellectual spectrum I recently came across a well-argued academic paper on the question of marriage institutions that takes as its starting point the premise that husbands will beat their wives. The authors of that paper whom I greatly admire and respect are not misogynists -- in fact quite the reverse. Yet given the conditions they find in their data they feel no qualms about taking coercion against women as a reasonable and normalised starting point.

Second, there is a deep confusion in Pakistan and elsewhere about the meaning of Islam and the implications of being Muslim in the modern world. In particular, there is confusion about the relationship between faith and citizenship. Jinnah's speech of 11th August 1947 has been alternately suppressed and revived, but the notion of citizenship propounded there has not yet come to be accepted by the polity as a whole. And yet, even among the ranks of those who believe that Pakistan ought to be a theological state, there is a fundamental slip in the argument. I would be quite interested in dealing with a theological argument for a theological state. Instead, the reasoning goes as follows: we must have Sharia in Pakistan because Pakistan is an Islamic state; Pakistan is an Islamic state because most of its citizens are Muslims. Is it not ironical that the theocrats ultimately rely on some notion of citizenship to motivate their political programme?

In any case, it is a fact of life that citizenship as a settled notion continuously finds itself stirred up and tossed about by reference to our Muslim identity. It is too easy to put this down to the political opportunism of a section of the clergy. I believe that there are real and genuine tensions and confusions in society at large – tensions and confusions that are similar to ones found among Muslim communities across the world.

Third, Pakistan is not yet at ease with its heritage and is unprepared to embrace and ensure its cultural future. The state is quite clearly multi-ethnic. Not just that, there are several diverse traditions of statecraft within the present-day territorial boundaries of Pakistan. The fact that Pakistanis are Brahvis, Sindhis, Seraikis, Baloch, Pashtun, Urdu-speaking, Punjabis, Gujaratis, Hunzais, Marwaris, Baltis and numerous others, remains a source of hyper-tension for some. It is hard to define a "Pakistani ethnicity" – sociologically speaking – unless this is done with reference to people of Pakistani origins living abroad. In other

countries Pakistanis have tried to construct themselves into a somewhat distinct group, but to a great degree this has been helped along by the classificatory schemes of their host states. Within Pakistan there are distinct cultures and ethnicities, generally centred around language, but also, in many cases invoking common origin myths, histories and political and social experiences.

Pakistan is not, of course, alone in this regard. In fact, virtually every nation-state is first a state and then a nation. Pakistan is also not unique as a place where ethnic identity is regarded as an existential threat by state-builders. In Turkey, for example, it was a criminal offence, until quite recently, to make public reference to the Kurdish people as belonging to a distinct ethnicity from the Turks. We have seen recently genocidal civil wars being fought in the Balkans and elsewhere over the vexed question of the ethnic identity of the state. If citizenship is the starting point of a vision, the ethnic issue appears to demand either prior cultural homogeneity of proto-citizens, or their agreed objective to arriving at a common culture. In reality both the routes can lead to violence and threats of cultural as well as physical annihilation of some groups.

The Nazis of Germany used to believe that a citizen can only be a person of proven German racial ancestry. They took this logic to a horrific extreme by physically eliminating people of Roma and Jewish origins who had previously been regarded as German citizens. The Thai state provides a stark example of the latter route, when it embarked upon a policy of Thaification of the ethnic Chinese community – forcing them to adopt the Thai language, culture and even Thai names. While Pakistan has thankfully not experience either of these two forms of brutality, a low level attrition continues between alternative cultural patterns of being Pakistani.

Urdu is widely accepted as the “national” language, or at the very least, as the common language of inter-ethnic communication in most cases. In fact Urdu has acquired this role largely through the expansion of market interactions between citizens of Pakistan. The expansion of Urdu has not, thankfully, occurred at the expense of other languages. But then neither has Urdu acquired the status of a language of power – this remains the preserve of English. Muddling through the ethnic issue has meant that Pakistan has not invested in the development of any of its ethnic and linguistic heritage.

Fourth, the notion of universal citizenship as being premised upon a shared humanity of citizens is challenged by socio-economic class. In this regard too, Pakistan is not unique in the world, but here too the specific conditions of the country require mention. In the classical Marxian model class is about the ownership of the means of production. Societies are divided into classes – such as the landlords, the capitalists and the workers – who are brought together to produce wealth, and then fall apart over its disposal. Such divisions create conditions whereby a person can be obscenely opulent while another might be at the brink of starvation. In other words, since human survival and sustenance requires material

resources, the systematically unequal distribution of these resources calls into question the shared humanity of citizens.

Class relations, of course, play themselves out in different countries in different ways. In Pakistan class is about the unequal ownership of resources such as land and capital. These inequalities have been addressed only from time to time, and never in a decisive manner. Then there are other forms of inequalities that have proven even more resilient. In Pakistan, social resources – such as access to networks and group collective action – are very important aspects of class. The workings of economic institutions such as markets are strongly mediated by prior social status. And inequalities in status have been prevalent features of social structures across the country. Unlike comparable countries that have taken recourse to affirmative action for the uplift of the most marginalised groups, we have mostly shied away from even acknowledging traditional hierarchies that translate into class oppression.

Is a Muslim Shaikh labourer in a village of central Punjab, for example, socially marginalised because he is poor, or is he poor because he is socially marginalised? This is a question that we rarely find asking ourselves. In fact, even while we are busy transacting all sorts of economic and political business within the paradigm of traditionally inherited social hierarchies, we appear to have a problem with acknowledging this in our “educated” fora. There is sufficient evidence now to prove that a great part of the economic suffering of “low” castes and traditionally oppressed groups is because of their social status, and not the other way round. There are also remarkable stories of change, freedom and upward mobility, but extra-economic, illegal and inhuman coercion –including verbal abuse, physical violence, restricted mobility, and threats of sexual abuse – are common experiences among historically marginalised communities. It is undignified to close the discussion by saying all these things happened in another time or in another country. They continue to happen here and now. Class inequality, in its extreme forms in Pakistan, is tantamount to the denial of our common humanity.

Fifth, citizenship would remain an empty word if it can be trumped at will by the old colonial notion of subjecthood. Before Pakistan there was a British Indian Empire. All of the peoples who came to form the citizenry of Pakistan were in some way or another subjects of the British Crown. They were not citizens. Sovereignty rested with the British monarch, even though in practice this meant that it rested with the British Parliament. Many of the important turning points of our politico-legal history were marked by acts of the British Parliament. The British Parliament had, in turn, delegated some sovereign powers of the British Indian Empire to the Viceroy – which literally means “someone who acts for the king”.

The Viceroy was a salaried public employee, who was also chief executive of the government of the British Indian Empire. He derived his authority as well as his power from a singular source – the colonial state. In any theory of political systems this would be a

devastating combination – and one that would produce grotesque outcomes. It would be akin to a computer programme going into a circular loop resulting in a crash. But these were the peculiar conditions of colonial governance. And the circular loop was avoided through the checks and balances imposed upon the Viceroy by the British Parliament, and on the British Parliament by the British electorate.

If citizenship is to be accepted, the idea of there being a singular source of power and authority would be absurd. The chief executive would derive her or his authority from one source – as determined by the system of political representation – and her or his power from another – as laid out in the system of administration. There will always be dangers, of course, of the two systems influencing one another, or of powerful or authoritative persons mixing them up in the pursuit of personal ambition or group advantage. Is it not strange that in the nearly 60 years since independence a salaried public servant has been the effective chief executive for over 30 years? In other words, like the Viceroy, the chief executive in Pakistan has derived power and authority from a singular source – the machinery of the state.

The active subversion of the institution of citizenship has meant that the colonial paternalistic notion of subjecthood has survived our transition from colonialism. This is not to say that simply the acceptance of citizenship and the shedding of subjecthood as a premise of the political system will resolve all of our political problems. In fact, those political problems would actually come into their own only once we move from the “subject” to the “citizenship” frame of reference. This we must acknowledge and learn to accept.

The five challenges to the notion of “citizenship as a starting point” are neither unique to Pakistan, nor are they intractable. In fact, beginning to accept the specificities of these challenges in Pakistan will a first step towards to moving ahead. The five challenges described above are obviously inter-related. Patriarchy is closely connected with class and social hierarchy as well as ideology; ethnicity and religion are two sometimes competing dimensions of national identity; and all of these shape the options of the transition from subjecthood to citizenship.

But there is value in discussing these challenges separately because they all entail different possibilities of change. While some aspects of patriarchy, for example, might take a long time to change, others such as those concerned with bodily integrity ought see more tangible progress in the near future. If we cannot even agree that women and men are equal, if different, then we might as well give up now. All our other ideological and political differences must be subsequent to this fundamental value that we need to espouse. The transition from subjecthood to citizenship is, in some ways, the easiest and the most difficult to achieve. It is easy because it is so hard to publicly defend the idea of subjecthood. It is difficult because it directly challenges the configuration of political power in the country. Addressing class inequalities does not necessarily require a violent revolution. There is enough in our own constitutional framework, and our policy paradigm for creating

administrative remedies to extreme class inequalities. At the same time, however, these class inequalities cannot be addressed without imposing some cost on those who are in positions of advantage, and will doubtless resist any change.

What can be achieved and what must be achieved before 2030? Things are happening all around us, over which we have little control, either as individuals or as collectivities. The technological revolution will continue apace. The technical possibilities for eradicating malnutrition, illiteracy, excess infant, child, and female mortality will expand. Innovative economic sectors will come up offering new opportunities. New centres of economic and political power will emerge in our neighbourhood. There will also be increasing dangers of war and destruction. Energy resources will become scarcer. Water will become an even more contested necessity than it already is. Internal regional and class conflicts cannot be ruled out.

In the realm of ideas, there will be a fiercer contest between ideas that are premised upon adversity – such as strategic advantage, aggressive nationalism, clash of civilisations, monopoly globalisation – and those based upon cooperation – institutionalised global governance, global solidarity, mutual economic advantage, cultural exchange. Pakistan and Pakistanis might be active participants in these contests on either side, they might be hapless bystanders who will not influence these contests but be affected by them but will be used as pawns. Much depends on what happens in Pakistan internally.

The world, of course, will be a better place if the ideas of cooperation prevail over those of adversity. The world will, indeed, be quite dismal if the remarkable technological and economic opportunities that are likely to open up are simply consumed to fuel existing power relations in the world at large. But to say anything of value with any credibility, Pakistan and Pakistanis will need to speak with the confidence of a people that has begun to tackle their own transition to citizenship in a frank, innovative, and principled manner.