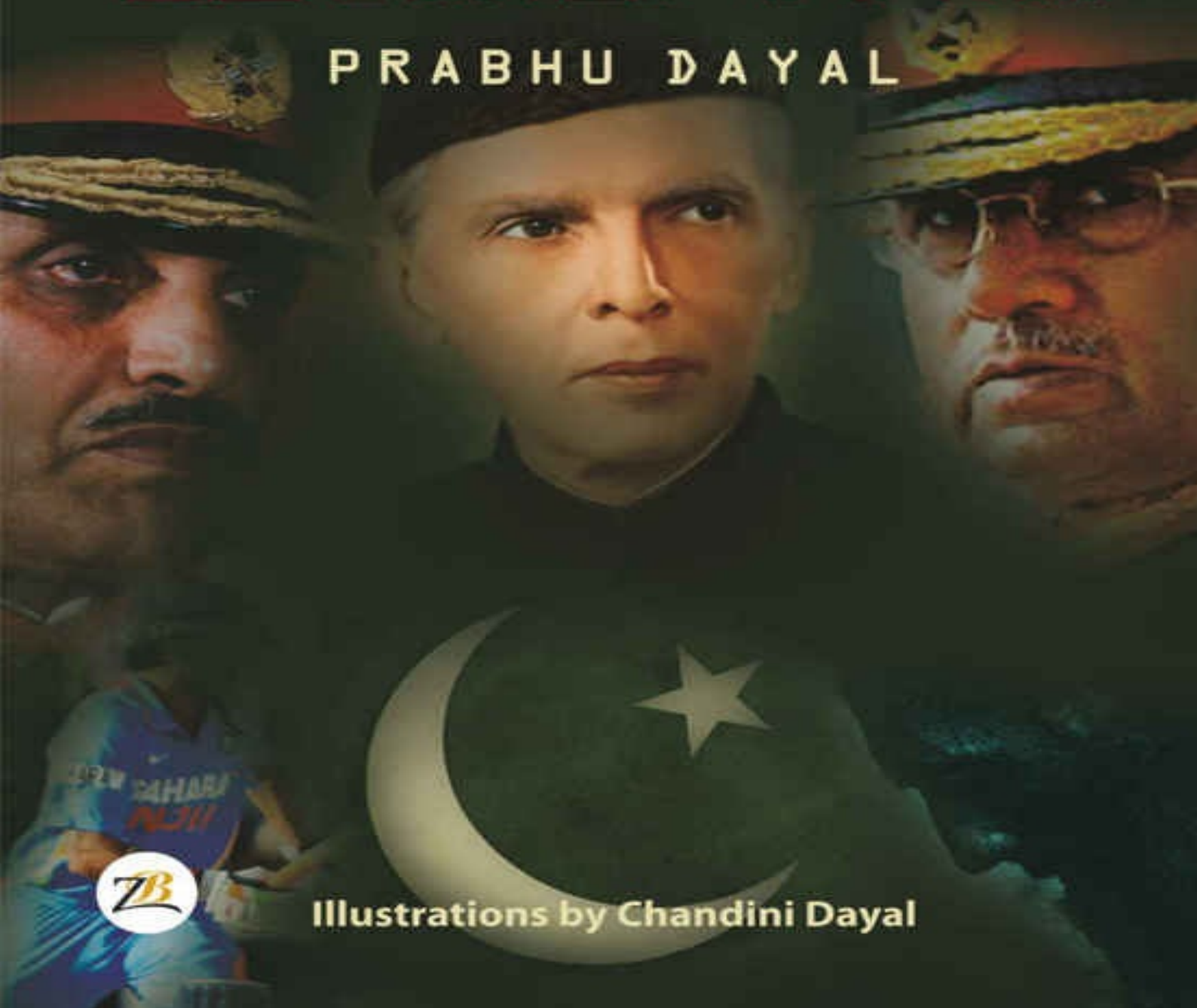


"Prabhu Dayal's delightful book.... Written in a breezy, anecdotal style, the book entertains even as it illuminates."

Dr Shashi Tharoor, M.P.

KARACHI HALWA

PRABHU DAYAL



Illustrations by Chandini Dayal

Praise

“Prabhu Dayal’s delightful book about his years in Karachi Consulate 1982-85 cover a gamut of subjects including Pakistan’s nuclear programme, US arms assistance, Kashmir, the Punjab problem, Zia’s Islamisation policies, movies, the plight of minorities, religious and ethnic violence and of course cricket. Written in a breezy, anecdotal style, the book entertains even as it illuminates. More than a memoir, a genuinely instructive read about a vital period in India-Pakistan relations.”

Dr Shashi Tharoor, M

Prabhu Dayal was a young, bright and enthusiastic diplomat, who joined me in my early days as Consul General Karachi in 1982. We then lived in interesting times. Pakistan was slowly, but surely, changing from being a relatively liberal country with a vibrant civil society, to a more conservative religious orientation, under the dictatorship of President Zia ul Haq.

Prabhu’s book provides a highly readable, enjoyable and perceptive insight into the times when Scotch Whiskey flowed freely in evening parties, in a city that was later to sadly become a hotbed of ethnic and sectarian tensions and violence”.

G Parthasarath

We learn from history. Prabhu Dayal in his book takes the reader through the labyrinth of Pakistan politics and its society during the 3 years from 1982-1985 when he was posted at India’s Karachi Consulate. This book attempts to pull the India -Pakistan relationship from the quagmire in which it is today.

Bhaskar Ghose, former Secretary to the Government of India

“Prabhu Dayal handles the recounting and analysis of the Pakistan political climate during the years 1982- 1985 with great insight and storytelling skills and presents a perspicacious analysis of the socio-political situation during that period. He handles the subject with elan and keeps you glued to the book till the last page’.

Mr. Shashank, former Foreign Secretary

Prabhu Dayal

Illustrations by Chandini Dayal



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Dedicated to my Twins

Akansha and Akshay



Dream on!

Prologue

It was the second half of 1981, and my tenure as Second Secretary at the Indian Embassy in Cairo was coming to an end. The three and a half years that I had spent in the Egyptian capital were a highly rewarding experience for a debutant in the complex world of international diplomacy.

Soon after my arrival in Cairo, Egypt and Israel had signed the *Camp David Accords* in September 1978, which paved the way for the Peace Treaty signed in March 1979. In recognition of this momentous achievement, President Sadat and Prime Minister Begin were jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for that year. In his acceptance speech, Sadat had said, “Let us put an end to wars, let us reshape life on the basis of solid equity and truth.”

This Peace Treaty ended the state of war that had existed between Egypt and Israel since 1948. It made Egypt the first Arab country to recognise Israel, but for the same reason it became unpopular in most of the other Arab countries. In their view, Sadat had betrayed the concept of Arab unity, and Egypt was suspended from the Arab League in 1979.

In short, it was a period of hectic diplomatic activity. I was on my toes all the time trying to cope with the tasks assigned to me. As a result, I was now looking for a good break. It was no secret to my colleagues at the Embassy that I was sure that I would soon be winging my way towards Europe or America for my next posting. I started daydreaming about all those wonderful places I might be headed to.

On one such day, a colleague walked into my office with a broad grin on his face and a telex message in his hand.

“Great news!” he proclaimed.

Trembling with excitement, I asked him: “Washington? London?”

His grin was so broad that I was sure it had to be one of these.

He handed me the telex – in those days e-mails or even fax messages had not yet arrived on the scene and all good and bad tidings were sent by the External Affairs Ministry by telex.

“KARACHI?” I screamed in disbelief, while his grin grew even broader. Not even in my worst nightmares had I seen myself being packed off to Karachi from Cairo.

I had every reason to believe that the Pakistanis would be hostile to me. Our two countries had fought wars in 1948, 1965 and 1971, respectively, and in the last amongst these, we had achieved a decisive victory that resulted in the creation of Bangladesh.

I was miserable at the thought of being sent off on a posting to a country where I was sure to be regarded as an enemy.

I stayed in Cairo for a few weeks more, agonising each day over how fate had dealt me such a cruel blow. I was so dejected that I could well have sat down to write my own obituary.

There was, however nothing else I could do about it.

Omar Khayyam's famous verse would often come to my mind:

*The moving finger writes, and having writ,
Moves on; nor all thy piety nor wit
Can lure it back to cancel half a line
Nor all thy tears wash out a word of it.*

While briefly in Delhi *en route* from Cairo to Karachi, I received a message from Additional Secretary SK Singh asking me to see him. It was his 'moving finger' that had decided to send me to Karachi, for he was the all-powerful head of administration at the Ministry of External Affairs. Some years later he would become the Foreign Secretary and move his finger with even greater authority to decide the fate of his colleagues – including the most senior ones.

"We are sending you to a challenging assignment," he told me. I interpreted this to mean that it was an assignment for which there were no takers.

Throughout our meeting, it was quite evident that he was just trying to cheer me up and boost my morale.

We had a chat about Karachi and the tasks for the Consulate. In a lighter vein, he remarked: "I love Karachi *halwa*. It's delicious, though it often gives me indigestion."

Halwa is an Arabic word meaning a dessert or sweet that is generally flour or nut based. The dessert itself has been adopted by many cuisines, which have introduced their own variations, and *halwa* is now part of the lexicon of many languages. The Indian subcontinent is home to many different types of *halwa* too, but Karachi *halwa* is a highly regarded and well-liked speciality.

Though I embarked on my stint in Karachi with little enthusiasm, the three and a half years I spent there turned out to be unforgettable in several respects and fill me with nostalgia even today, after the passage of three decades.

My diplomatic career has taken me to several continents, but I must admit that in no other country do I feel such an overpowering sense of a common heritage as I did in Pakistan. In both countries, the issues in focus are those that divide us. This is of course, unfortunate since present-day India and Pakistan have existed under similar influences for millennia and have remarkable similarities in a number of areas such as language, literature, art and architecture.

I found that there was something rather unique about the experience of living amidst my colonial cousins. The warmth and affection that I sometimes received there remain etched in my memory.

One occasion that I remember fondly was when I wanted to buy a camel-skin lamp and found a shop that had just what I wanted. As I was paying the bill, the elderly shopkeeper somehow figured out the

I was from India, and asked me which city I hailed from. When I told him that I was from Allahaba ~~he refused to take any money from me as his wife was also from there! Finally, he agreed to let me pay, as long as I would accept two lamps for the price of one!~~

During my stay in Karachi, I met several people who were the very embodiment of sophistication and refinement. Remnants of the legendary *nawabi* era, they were a charming blend of wealth and culture – poignant reminders of an age fast receding into the past.

There were also many enchanting evenings I spent at spellbinding concerts of Pakistani maestros, or *mushairas* (Urdu poetic symposia) graced by the participation of renowned Pakistani poets. I felt truly enriched by such cultural fiestas.

Then there were those equally enjoyable evenings that I spent just relaxing in the company of a few close Pakistani friends. Such occasions gave me the opportunity to savour the best of Karachi humour – always original, though at times somewhat cynical.

These and many other memories fill me with sweetness even today.

On the other hand, I was often witness to the unabashed lying and duplicity that Pakistani leaders have developed into a fine art. Their pronouncements were often at such variance with ground realities that they were difficult to digest.

My posting in Pakistan turned out to be so much like Karachi *Halwa*!





Mightier than the mighty

Karachi, located on the Arabian Sea coastline is the capital of the Sindh province of Pakistan. It is Pakistan's largest and most populous city.

When I lived there in the early Eighties, the population of the city was around 9 million, which has today grown to over 15 million. The population of Greater Metro Karachi stands at a staggering 22 million making it the most populous city in the Islamic world.

This gigantic metropolis reputedly started as a small fishing village established by settlers from Baluchistan and the Makran coast. Legend says that an old fisherwoman Mai Kolachi (*Mai* means senior and respected lady and Kolachi was her tribe) along with her community settled in the Indus valley delta. Named Kolachi after them, the settlement gradually grew into a bustling port. There is a locality in Karachi that is still called Mai Kolachi. Interestingly, the name Karachi was first used in a Dutch document in 1742 when a merchant vessel was shipwrecked near it.

Karachi was the capital of Pakistan till 1958. The capital was shifted that year to Rawalpindi and later on to Islamabad. However, Karachi's importance did not really diminish as it remained Pakistan's leading financial centre as well as its main seaport and industrial hub.

The people of Karachi considered their city to be the liveliest in the country, even more so than Lahore. Many of them would dismiss the sparkling capital city of Islamabad as being a soulless place.

There was a joke that someone from Karachi won a week's free stay in Islamabad as the first prize in a raffle. He actually requested the organisers to give him the second prize because he couldn't bear the thought of spending a whole week in boring Islamabad, only to discover to his horror that the second prize was a two-week free stay in Islamabad!

The demographic structure of Karachi is rather interesting. Although Karachi is the capital of Sindh, the Sindhis themselves constitute only around 7% of its population. Punjabis make up 16% of the population, while the Pathans and Balochis make up 11.5% and 4.5%, respectively. *Muhajirs* are the largest constituent and make up more than 60% of the population.

Muhajir is a term used to describe immigrants and their descendants who migrated from different regions of India at the time of partition, that most bloody event in the history of the subcontinent which witnessed the killing of an estimated half a million people. Around 7.3 million Hindus and Sikhs moved to India from Pakistan, while around 7.2 million Muslims did so from India to Pakistan in what was the biggest population transfer in history.

Most of the immigrants from India who hailed from the region of present-day Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh settled in Pakistan's Punjab province, while those who came from the British Raj Provinces of Bombay, United Provinces, Central Provinces, Bihar and elsewhere, settled down mainly in Karachi and some other cities of Sindh, such as Hyderabad, Sukkur and Mirpur Khas.

During my numerous interactions with various Sindhis in Karachi, I noticed how these facts relating to the city's demographic composition rankled them.

In a city with such a high percentage of *Muhajirs*, the Indian Consulate was bound to have a high degree of relevance and importance. The *Muhajirs* had relatives in India—parents, siblings, in-laws, uncles and aunts—whom they wanted to visit from time to time.

The Karachi Consulate's jurisdiction also covered the provinces of Sindh and Baluchistan and included many other cities, such as Hyderabad and Nawabshah which had a sizeable population of *Muhajirs* too. Thus, the pressure on the Consulate's visa section was bound to be extremely high at times, as I was to discover in no time.

I served under two Consuls General— Mani Shankar Aiyar followed by G. Parthasarathy—both of whom ranked among the best Foreign Service Officers of their generation. Later, Mani left the Foreign Service and entered politics going on to become a Cabinet Minister in the Manmohan Singh government, while Partha rose to the highest echelons of the Foreign Service and held several important assignments, including that of High Commissioner to Pakistan. They provided an inspiring leadership to their colleagues in the Consulate and made extraordinary efforts to build a broad-based relationship with Pakistan. It was a great learning experience and a privilege to serve under them both.

When it comes to dealing with Pakistan, Mani is perceived as a dove while Partha is seen as a hawk. However, these labels had not yet been affixed on them when they were heading the Karachi Consulate in the 1980s. They were both considered top notch diplomats endowed with incredible energy, intellect and commitment to their professional responsibilities.

K. Natwar Singh was the Indian Ambassador in Islamabad at that time. Considered very powerful in the Foreign Service community and a brilliant public speaker, he was also highly respected in Pakistani intellectual circles.

One anecdote always comes to my mind when I think of those days.

Ambassador Natwar Singh and his wife had come on a visit to Karachi, and wanted to buy some table tops made from onyx, the beautiful green marble for which Pakistan is so famous. We went to several showrooms, but Mrs. Singh did not like any of the pieces shown to her. Getting a bit tired of going from showroom to showroom, the Ambassador pointed to a few table tops remarking that they were 'very nice' and that they should just buy them.

Mrs. Singh snapped at him: "Natwar, you don't listen!" To which he replied with a shrug: "What else do I do?" It was difficult but I somehow managed to control myself from laughing out loud. Even the mighty Ambassador Natwar Singh was no different from most of us!





Mir Jafar, the wretched traitor!

II

The Indian Consulate General is located on Fatima Jinnah Road, named after the sister of Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan. Located less than half a mile down the same road is the Flagstaff House. Although Jinnah owned this building, he had never lived there himself. However, after his death, Fatima Jinnah moved in and lived there till 1964. The building was later acquired by the Pakistan Government and converted into a museum depicting Jinnah's life. It is one of the most important heritage buildings in Karachi and is now called *Quaid-e-Azam House*.

Jinnah is greatly revered in Pakistan as *Quaid e Azam*, which means 'Great Leader'. This title has also been bestowed by their respective countries on China's Mao Zedong as well as North Korea's Kim Il-sung, Kim Jong-Il and Kim Jong-un.

Another landmark was the Sind Club. Situated just a stone's throw away from our Consulate, this club had the highest snob value in Karachi. It continues to use the British colonial spelling 'Sind' even though the province is spelt as 'Sindh' after independence.

The Sind Club had been set up for the Colonialists, and natives were not allowed into it. It was only in 1952 that a few Pakistanis were admitted as members. A Pakistani was allowed to become its President only as late as 1965! Women were not allowed into the club, except for the Ladies Dinner held every two months and for the Club's Annual Dinner. The club actually had a sign saying 'Women and dogs not allowed'! This was removed only after independence.

Incidentally, Iskander Mirza was among the first Pakistanis to be admitted as a member of the Sind Club in 1952. He was the last Governor General of Pakistan from 1955-56 and subsequently, the first President of the country when the Constitution was promulgated in 1956. He was also the great grandson of Mir Jafar, also known as 'Mir Jafar the Wretched Traitor', whom the British made the Nawab of Bengal after they had defeated Siraj ud Daula. Mir Jafar was a puppet of the British East India Company and is someone who is reviled in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Pakistan's national poet Allama Iqbal described Mir Jafar as 'a disgrace to the faith, a disgrace to the nation and a disgrace to the country'. In Urdu, the term *Mir Jafar* is used in the same sense as *quisling* is used in English!

Yet, it was the same Mir Jafar whose great grandson became the first President of Pakistan! As someone cynically remarked, "What a torchbearer! Imagine what blood flows in his veins!"

Situated next door to the Consulate was the mansion of the Haroon family, descendants of Sir Abdullah Haroon who had been one of Jinnah's closest associates. Having piloted the *Independence of Pakistan Resolution* in the Sindh Provincial Muslim League Conference at Karachi in 1938, he had been regarded as a very important leader of the Muslim League.

Sir Abdullah Haroon's younger son Mahmood Haroon was Interior Minister of Pakistan at that time while his grandson Hameed Haroon was running *The Dawn*, Pakistan's most prestigious newspaper. Another grandson, Hussain Haroon was active in Sindh politics, but was far better known in his

capacity as President of the Sind Club. Later on, he would serve as Pakistan's representative to the UN during the Zardari government and was regarded by everyone who knew him in New York as a perfect gentleman. The Haroon family was held in the highest esteem not just in Karachi, but elsewhere in Pakistan too.

The Pak-American Cultural Centre and the British Council were located across the road from the Indian Consulate.

However, even though there were many important landmarks in the vicinity, the hustle and bustle in this neighbourhood was always centred round the Indian Consulate, which had huge crowds of visitors and seekers thronging to it all day long.

The residence of the Indian Consul General was located at 63, Clifton, across the road from 70 Clifton, better known as Bhutto House. Clifton was the most affluent area of Karachi and housed many of the rich and powerful. In recent years, Clifton has gained notoriety because Dawood Ibrahim, India's most wanted terrorist who has been given sanctuary in Pakistan, is believed to be living in Clifton.

A posse of policemen was deployed at the entrance of the Consul General's residence, not only to provide security to him, but also to keep an eye on visitors entering and leaving Bhutto House while Benazir Bhutto was being kept under house arrest there.

The Indian Government owned three other compounds which were used for the residences of other officers and staff members. These were thoughtfully named Hindustan Court, Panchsheel Court and Shivaji Court, respectively. Over 50 families who resided there valued the security afforded by their togetherness. Life in Karachi could be violent and unpredictable at that time and has become much more so over the years.

The Indian government acquired these building complexes with sprawling compounds to set up the High Commission since Karachi was the capital of Pakistan when it came into existence in 1947. However, the capital was shifted to Rawalpindi in 1958 and later on to Islamabad, and the High Commission also moved there. The Consulate had a well-equipped auditorium and massive lawns where hundreds of invitees could attend events. However, the variety of restrictions imposed by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan (especially on dance and music) meant that we could utilise these facilities only to a very limited extent.

The Consulate was closed in 1994, and all these buildings are lying completely unutilised. It is doubtful that the Consulate will be reopened anytime soon. An inspection of these buildings some years ago showed that they had been vandalised and many of the movable items had been taken away by 'thieves', even though the premises are guarded by the police.





Even the toothy smile could not conceal.....

III

Karachi winters are usually mild, but there was a cold wave when I landed there in December as had snowed a day earlier in Quetta. Whatever happens in Quetta, the effects are always felt in Karachi as well as in many other places in Pakistan.

However, much more chilling was the Martial Law that had been in force in Pakistan since July 1977 when General Muhammad Zia ul Haq staged a coup, deposed the elected Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, became Chief Martial Law Administrator and subsequently, President.

Zia had Bhutto executed in April 1979 and arrested his daughter, Benazir as well as several other political leaders who opposed him.

Naturally, Zia was feared by the common man in Pakistan. After he assumed power, people did not take long to figure out how wily and deceitful a person he was; nothing that he said was to be taken at face value. Zia's eyes reflected his steely determination as well as his ruthlessness. Even his toothy smile could not camouflage this aspect of his character.

But Zia could be a real charmer whenever he wanted. KB Lal, the renowned civil servant and diplomat, once narrated an anecdote that illustrates Zia's tremendous public-relations skills.

When Zia overthrew Bhutto and became President, people came to know from a press release that he had studied at the famous St. Stephen's College in Delhi. Since none of his contemporaries had any recollection of him, they reached out to Professor Kapadia, who was considered a walking encyclopaedia on all matters pertaining to St Stephens. He just could not recall anyone by the name Zia-ul-Haq. Even when shown a group photograph, Prof. Kapadia was unable to do so. When someone pointed to a boy in the last row, Professor Kapadia pondered awhile and then nodded, perhaps it was Zia, but he couldn't be sure. On being asked how Zia had been as a student, Prof. Kapadia replied "Ordinary sort of fellow..." in a somewhat dismissive manner.

Some years later, a group of teachers and students from St. Stephens College, which included Professor Kapadia, visited Pakistan at Zia's invitation. Not only did Zia host a dinner for them at his residence, he himself came down to the portico to receive them. All through the dinner, he showered the guests with utmost affection and attention and was particularly warm towards Prof. Kapadia whom he repeatedly referred to as his old history teacher. All this completely bowled over the Professor, and in subsequent years whenever someone asked him what Zia-ul-Haq was like in his college days, his reply had changed to: "Brightest boy in the class!"

Zia-ul-Haq was born into a lower middle class family in August 1924 in Jalandhar, India. His father was a clerk in the British Indian Army. Zia studied in Simla and then went to St. Stephens College. He joined the British Indian Army in 1943 and fought in the Second World War in Burma. In 1947, he joined the newly formed Pakistan Army and served as a tank commander in the Indo-Pak War of 1965.

Zia was stationed in Jordan from 1967-70 as a Brigadier and helped to train King Hussein's forces.

Significantly, he led the Jordanian troops he was training into battle during the *Black September* operations against the Palestinians.

Black September was a conflict between the PLO led by Yasser Arafat and the native Jordanians led by King Hussein. Thousands of people, mainly Palestinians, were killed in the fighting. The Jordanian army triumphed and this helped the King to remain in power. Zia won King Hussein's gratitude, but became a hated figure for the Palestinians.

On his return to Pakistan, he was promoted to Major General and then Lieutenant General.

My Pakistani friends told me how in the race towards the top, he managed to steal a march on his peers, who were completely outsmarted by this wily fox. He was commanding the 2nd Strike Corps in Multan when he invited Prime Minister Bhutto for an official visit. As part of the preparations, he got his tailor to stitch a Ceremonial Military uniform for Bhutto.

The Prime Minister was very pleased at being asked to dress in this military attire because he liked pomp and ceremony. He was also made to climb atop a tank and shoot a target, which was duly hit. Bhutto was thrilled as he thought that he himself had hit the target, but in reality it was hit by someone else from another tank! Knowing Bhutto's over-sized ego, Zia had devised this ingenious method of flattery!

Zia also reportedly made it a point to meet Bhutto privately and pledge his loyalty to him.

Sure enough, a few months later, Bhutto controversially appointed General Zia ul Haq as Chief of Army Staff superseding as many as seven more senior officers. He trusted Zia and believed that Zia was religious and non-political. According to Pakistani sources, the Americans also lobbied for Zia because they found him more acceptable than other officers senior to him.

The wily and scheming Zia had carried the day and stolen a march on the others. The rest is history.

In later years, Nawaz Sharif would make a similar mistake as Bhutto had made. Whoever said that learning from history is easy?





The art of shaving

IV

Just after staging the coup against Bhutto on 5th July 1977, Zia appeared on national television and said: “My sole aim is to hold free and fair elections which will be held in October this year. Soon after the polls, power will be transferred to the elected representatives of the people. I give a solemn assurance that I will not deviate from this schedule.”

Years passed but Zia kept dragging his feet on the issue of holding elections. He was completely insincere about his solemn promise to the nation and kept postponing the elections on some pretext or another.

The joke summing up the popular cynicism doing the rounds in Karachi is worth recalling.

Zia’s barber would come to shave him every morning. While shaving, the barber would ask him, “Sir, when are you going to hold the elections?”

Zia would just parry the question and reply, “After some time.”

One day Zia got irritated with the barber for asking him the same question about elections every day. “You’re just a barber, not a politician,” he said rudely. “Why do you keep asking when I will hold the elections?”

To this the barber replied coolly: “Sir, I’m not really concerned about this matter – but whenever I mention the word ‘elections’, your hair stands up and I find it easier to give you a shave!”

I heard this joke at several Pakistani gatherings, and on each occasion everyone would burst into raucous laughter. It was a pointer to what they really thought about their President’s promise.

Although Zia had given a solemn assurance about handing over power to elected representatives within 90 days of the coup, he had no intention whatsoever of actually doing so. Like many other military dictators, he spoke of the indiscipline which accompanies a multi-party parliamentary democracy. He preferred the Presidential system, with decisions being made by a handpicked team. Zia’s team comprised mainly serving and retired military officers, retired bureaucrats and technocrats.

Zia ruled as only a dictator would. Civilian authority was completely subjugated by him, and Martial Law Administrators were put in charge at every level. Zia himself was the Chief Martial Law Administrator till he took over the office of the President of the country on 16 September 1978.

Although many opportunistic civilians also began to range themselves alongside him, his real support base was the army.

Zia disbanded the Parliament in 1979 and replaced it with the Majlis Shoora, which was merely a consultative council to advise him on the process of Islamisation.

The members of the Majlis were not elected, but appointed by Zia. Their job was to merely endorse

his decisions. He nominated all the ministers of the Federal Government too. Among the people appointed were Agha Shahi as Foreign Minister. A career diplomat, Shahi had served as Foreign Secretary under Bhutto. Zia also appointed the well-known World Bank economist Dr. Mahbubul Haq as Finance Minister.

In similar fashion, Zia (or his Governors) appointed all the Provincial Ministers. Naturally, most such appointees regarded Zia as their political godfather. It may be mentioned that Pakistan's current Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif also made his debut in the political arena with Zia's blessings.

Under Zia's dispensation, a search was launched for new urban leaders willing to serve under the Martial Law regime and Nawaz Sharif was hand-picked to be the Finance Minister of Punjab province. A corporate tycoon and owner of a steel mill, he had been devastated by Bhutto's nationalisation policies. His entry into politics was believed to have been on account of the need to get back his business. Not unexpectedly, as Finance Minister of Punjab he piloted the denationalisation legislation and got back his steel mill.

Later, with Zia's support, Nawaz Sharif became the Chief Minister of Punjab province and acquitted himself well in this important role. Given the preponderance of the Punjab province in Pakistani politics, it was widely believed that in the coming days he would play an important role in national level politics – and this turned out to be true. When he assumed power on the national stage, he completely reversed Bhutto's nationalisation policies and ushered in other policies based on economic liberalisation.

Thus, the unabated hostility between the Bhutto family and Nawaz Sharif had its origins in the nationalisation of Sharif's steel mill. Had this nationalisation not taken place, Nawaz Sharif may well have focussed his attention only on his business and perhaps not found it necessary to enter politics. This was a classic case of adversity turning into opportunity.

Pakistani politics is a bumpy ride. It is ironic that Nawaz Sharif pitted himself against Bhutto and alongside the coup-stager General Zia – only to be ousted later when he himself was the elected Prime Minister by another coup-stager, General Musharraf!





Up above the world so high, I am a General in the sky

Zia was able to sideline the political parties and keep Pakistan under martial law due to the backing of the army.

A lot has already been spoken and written about the pivotal role the army plays in Pakistan. It is the final arbiter in politics and perhaps, everything else. However, there is some check on the army's privileges when there is a civilian government in Pakistan. Under Zia's Martial Law Regime, there were hardly any checks and the army's power was absolute.

Zia created a system wherein his fellow officers stood to gain a lot if he continued in power. Officers of the armed forces enjoyed power and pelf which they were loath to let go and therefore, supported him to the hilt unconditionally.

Zia made sure that in virtually every sphere it was the army that ruled the roost. Generals close to him were appointed Provincial Governors, administering martial law in their respective jurisdictions. There were also Martial Law Administrators at every level who often rode roughshod over the civilian officials.

Being from a country such as India where the army never oversteps its role, I found the situation in Pakistan not just strange, but also tragic. I was witness to how civilian authority was being systematically humiliated, crushed and demoralised.

Zia enhanced the army's stake in the corporate sector significantly. The *Fauji Foundation*, a corporate organisation run by the army, was expanded considerably during his tenure. It became one of the largest corporate groups in Pakistan. Naturally, all the plum positions went to senior Generals who were loyal to Zia. It was cronyism of a sort which I could never have imagined earlier.

Not just the politicians, but many other people were unhappy with the army's encroachment on civilian authority. The army was seen to have generated unprecedented material benefits for itself, a fact which became a source of resentment among the common people. This was most visible in the real estate sector.

There was a new vigour with which Defence Housing Societies were developed, and army officers got large plots of land at throwaway prices. Many Pakistanis felt that the army was misusing its position while also getting distracted from its actual role and functions. I heard a joke on this in a Pakistani gathering, which reflected the widespread cynicism about what was going on.

Generals from various countries were sent up in a rocket to orbit around the planet. They were given telescopes to see what was happening on planet Earth. The American quickly found a nice location for himself and was soon looking intently into his telescope. When asked what he was looking at, he replied that he was looking at the places the Soviet troops were concentrated in.

The Russian who was also peering into his telescope, explained that he was observing the build-up

the NATO troops. The Indian said he was looking at the borders of China and Pakistan to see the troop deployments. Similarly, all the Generals explained what they were looking at.

The Pakistani General was by himself in one corner, looking intently into his telescope. When the others around him asked whether he was studying the Soviet deployments in Afghanistan or the positions of the Indian troops across the border, he replied nonchalantly, "I'm trying to see which corner plots are available in Lahore's Defence Housing Society."



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