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I have been privileged to visit Moscow last September, thanks to this Institute. I will be very frank, I was mesmerized by Moscow and I fell in love with St. Petersburg. As a frequent visitor to Western Europe, it never crossed my mind that the east of Europe has developed in such an amazing way, though I had a slight idea through written word that Moscow was regarded once as ‘the third Rome’.

When I see or attempt to understand Russia, I view it is an old country, its personality is more than 1000 years old. It initiated in the Kievan Rus, the principality of Moscow was relatively small, but then it reached new heights in the era of Peter the Great and Catherine the Great and then the last Tsar Nicolas II and the Bolshevik revolution. This old country eventually was the one bold enough to challenge the entire international order. This old and unique country had a certain confidence and did not shy away from the values and beliefs it had chosen for its people. For me Russia is an expression and that expression needs to be conveyed and articulated not just within its own territorial boundaries, but related to the whole region.

And what was happening on our (Pakistan’s) side? Probably, we were being viewed through the prism of United India. I mean, we were known by the intervention of Ubaidullah Sindhi and all the communists which were referred to by my colleague (Walid Iqbal). **There was a lot of acceptance and welcoming thoughts from the left of Pakistan for the former Soviet Union, particularly in the province of Baluchistan where I hail from.**

Anyway, Pakistan’s history is as unique as Russia’s. Russia long ago took the nascent steps and reached its adulthood. We on the other hand I feel are still at an embryonic stage, but we have very deep philosophical and spiritual tendencies which are shaping our future. I would quote here the great inspiration of our region Dr. Iqbal; there was a debate within Pakistan movement and most of the clergy and scholars of Islam **were initially not in favor of the idea of a nation state as they said Islam as a religion as well as way of life transcended national boundaries.** People say there is only one person, the sole spokesperson Jinnah. Yes, he was one for practical purposes, but as far as the cognitive activity and philosophy is concerned, Iqbal was the only honest, open, candid man who spoke otherwise. I quote him:

*“Ajam hunuznada’nad ramuzedeenuwerna
Ze deobandhussainahmedaenchebualajbiast”*

Deoband order is the equivalent of the Eastern Orthodox Church in Sunni Islam. It was a reformist movement in united India and its director at that time was Hussain Ahmed who was well revered like the chief patriarch of so to say Eastern orthodoxy in Islam. I have heard that he was well known here in Russia. **Hussain Ahmed insisted on a secular idea of Muslim nationalism** and he (Iqbal) approaches him and tells him, that you do not have the slightest idea, ajam, of the essence of religion. And what was

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this essence he referred to? It was the experiment of the Medina city-state, that small polity of the Prophet. In Makkah the Prophet tried, with his 313 followers for 13 years to convey the Message, but he faced stiff resistance. And it was only after that he migrated to Medina and formed a polity and established territorial control had the Message received wide reception. After ten years in Medina the Message was accepted by the entire Arabian Peninsula and to this day the Prophet has more or less 1.4 billion followers. Creating that territorial polity was crucial for Islam in the historical context.

Pakistan was an expression of a new enlightened and spiritual democracy. This concept brings a myriad of intellectual and spiritual challenges at a regional, national and global level and we are aware that it will continue to present challenges till the end of time. There is no end of history, it was a fallacy this idea. We, human beings, are creative and kaleidoscopic. We can come up with new ideas and approaches and no force can halt this human spirit. Some ideas are universal and last for ages, while others fade away into history. The lasting quality of an idea is determined by its value for the people, as well as how acceptable the idea is to people.

I personally believe that at this stage Russia and Pakistan have a lot in common. I come from Baluchistan where Gwadar port gives access to warm waters which, on one hand, opens up the African continent, while on the other hand, the Arabian civilization and it also connects to the Xinjiang area. Where it is lacking in connectivity is to Eurasia. I sometimes envisage, that there is motorway which starts in Gwadar and ends in Moscow and it will happen someday and this connectivity of physical infrastructure will translate to better understanding between people. This will contribute to free flow of ideas, as people will learn each other's languages and have access to each other's literature. We know Dostoyevsky, we know Gorky but it is our failure that Baba Ghulam Farid, Khushal Khattak, Jam Duurak are unknown to this part of the world, as these are great literary minds of their time and in my opinion no less genius than Goethe or Shakespeare, but due to the lack of understanding of language we have been unable to appreciate each other's literature, culture, civilization. We have more proximity to Russia in terms of being part of the larger Asian family. If we initiate a motorway, probably, in twenty-four hours I will be able to drive to Moscow.

We need to see the future in a unique way with a new spirit. There are a lot of opportunities for all of us. We in Pakistan are nearly 250 million people, according to a new census, that makes a huge consumer market and the majority of the population consists of young able people who can contribute to the advancement of the country.

Above all, Pakistan and Russia no doubt share not the same religion, but the same value system which has the same source — the Abrahamic religious system and all the Abrahamic religions are cousins which kindles a positive spirit amongst followers.

I Thank You!