[**Culture of corruption**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1635344/culture-of-corruption)

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THE ongoing school and college examinations across the country mark the advent of the cheating season. As expected, the national discourse is now focused on the malpractices of both candidates and examiners. Also under discussion are the incompetency and corruption of the examination boards which not only tolerate this ugly feature of our education system but actually facilitate it.

If it comforts our education bosses, they should know they are not alone. The fact is that cheating in exams is an integral part of our national culture of corruption. Ironically the most incompetent are also the most corrupt. Take the case of the police department of which I am reminded every July when the US secretary of state releases his trafficking of persons (TIP) report. Pakistan figures quite prominently. I take an interest in it because I have been pursuing the case of two minor girls who were taken away by their stepbrother and, from what the police told me, ‘rented out’ to a brothel keeper by the alleged criminal for Rs120,000 per month. It is shocking that our police cannot recover them.

The 2021 TIP report reiterates that Pakistan does not meet the minimum standards to eliminate trafficking. It cites the complicity of state officials as a major cause of failure. According to the report the number of kidnapped people in Pakistan in 2020 went up to 32,022, a huge jump from 19,954 in 2019. Of these, 15,255 were women and 6,937 children. The report says there is not enough investigation and conviction which creates impunity in the perpetrators and gives a fillip to trafficking that feeds the multimillion-rupee business of prostitution and bonded labour.

One could go on to give more examples. But there is need for some dispassionate analysis. The end goal of all corruption is to get extra money by quick, wrongful means. This is not needed. But it is believed that this money earned through illegal means gives a sense of security to a severely insecure person who also lacks confidence. Actually, it gives neither security nor confidence.

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One may then ask why some societies are more corrupt than others? It is simply because some states have strong preventive structures firmly in place, and a corrupt person cannot get away easily. The price for a wrongdoing is very high in these societies. Another factor is what values societies inculcate in their citizens. At one time, we had psychological barriers — these have been whittled away. Thus people have no concern for their personal and family’s safety and honour (reputation). Transparency is no longer prevalent, which has created a shocking degree of acceptability of corruption. Avarice is so deeply entrenched in society today that it drives out all other considerations — even religious values — in determining individual and national decision-making.

How did this happen? Two significant factors are responsible. First is the economics of neoliberalism which emerged in the post-Cold War age and now rules the roost. It stands for the concentration of wealth that inevitably creates deep fissures between the haves and have-nots, pushing social justice out of the way unhindered by socialist ideology. The second is the media’s role. The digital, social and mainstream media is contributing to this phenomenon. They glorify wealth, ostentation and luxury to such an extent that the worship of wealth has subtly entered the public psyche. This process is intensified by the globalisation of communications.

One should still not despair though the landscape is so bleak. The government and others controlling the centres of power may not be doing eno­ugh to check corruption. Where the impact can be most felt is in the opinion-making sector in favour of transparency. True, it has not been easy for individuals trying to clean the Augean stables of corruption in Pakistan. But that should not deter the brave ones — individuals — from attempting to counter television’s role in creating an unhealthy environment which corrupts the psyche of the young. It is time individuals launched campaigns against the evil influences of the media.

There are many study groups and mentoring circles that have sprouted in the most unusual of places. Last week, I was in Lyari discussing the language issue with members of the Raaji Baloch Women Association, They meet regularly and what is there to stop them from talking about what the media has to say and how it is corrupting the youth?

There are many others who want to articulate their views and are full of new ideas and dynamism. The mental and intellectual energy they display is amazing, I have met many of them and participated in their discussions. We must encourage such individuals who have plenty of potential to create the thrust against corruption which is the need of the hour.

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