**Menace of Legalised Corruption**

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January 30, 2024

Speak the truth, even if your voice trembles. The downfall of every nation comes, not from the moral corruption of the common man, but rather from the moral complacency of the blokes in high places. In Pakistan, one notices a distinct contrast in ethical values and financial integrity between the haves and privileged ones, who tend to be more corrupt, compared to the have-nots and less-privileged. While the poverty-stricken masses face numerous challenges, the privileged elite experiences a steady rise in the prevalence of legalised financial exploitation. As one climbs up the hierarchy in Pakistan, sanctioned financial dishonesty intensifies proportionally. The unjustifiable privileges they enjoy are justified through the manipulation of false symbols of security, safety and status.

The roots of this corrupt culture can be traced back to the legacy of colonialism when the ruling Masters exercised control over the enslaved population of the Subcontinent. Regrettably, the practice is continuing till today. Even in their retirement years, members of the privileged class continue to foster an environment conducive to institutional dishonesty. The enduring sight of retired police guards, domestic servants, and government vehicles signifies the undeniable exploitation carried out under the guise of legality.

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The ripple effects of corruption permeate every facet of society, including political, social, and economic domains. The wide-ranging implications stemming from the decay of social norms impede political development while worsening societal divides by forging substantial rifts between the rich and the poor. The rampant financial corruption in Pakistan, particularly among those in positions of authority, is primarily to be blamed for the crisis of poverty and unemployment, the surge in social crimes, escalating inequality, moral and economic decline, and extensive harm to government institutions. Corruption systematically dismantles the very foundation of institutions, erodes the rule of law, and fundamentally undermines the legitimacy of the state. Consequently, it engenders profound effects on governance, stifles economic development, and hampers overall growth. The strain it places on the ability of the government to prioritise essential public services such as education, healthcare, water and sanitation, and law enforcement results in notable deficits in the finances.

The absence as well as violation of a robust framework for appointment and posting further exacerbates these issues. The allocation of government positions to the bureaucrats often exhibits unethical practices such as political manoeuvring, nepotism, and favouritism. Bribery and extortion are also prevalent, with individuals accepting or soliciting bribes to expedite services, and approvals, or to neglect legal obligations. The lack of transparency in decision-making processes contributes to this issue, as it hinders communication and accountability. The deliberate misuse of public funds for personal gain is a common occurrence by senior officials in almost all departments. Furthermore, the presence of corruption within the judiciary undeniably multiply the nuisance and results in various setbacks within the justice system, given that bribery and political influences consistently impact judicial processes across all tiers.

Institutionalised dishonesty encompasses the engagement, acceptance, or endorsement of corrupt conduct by several individuals operating within the framework, gradually becoming entrenched and enduring as an inherent feature of the group. It can withstand changes in personnel and leadership, making it more challenging to eradicate due to its clandestine nature. Weak governance structures, a lack of accountability, and the collaboration between politicians, bureaucrats, and business elites multiply the emergence of financial mismanagement problems. This collusion allows for the embezzlement of public funds, bribery, money laundering, and other illicit activities. Moreover, the persistence of this corrupt system is sustained by ineffective regulations and enforcement mechanisms, ultimately causing a misallocation of resources and hindering growth prospects while aggravating income inequality and poverty. Additionally, it erodes public trust in the ability of the government to effectively manage finances and undermines foreign investment confidence.

Considering the fact that people have been either combating corruption or experiencing its negative consequences for many years, should we come to terms with it as an inherent aspect of life and carry forward, or make efforts to resist it in situations within our control? Financial corruption not only erodes the macroeconomic performance of a country but also widens the gap between rich and poor by accelerating income inequality and poverty levels. Good governance can only exist in a corruption-free environment. It is a systemic issue that has plagued the country’s governance system for decades, hindering its progress and depriving its citizens of their rightful resources and opportunities.

Pakistan consistently ranks among the highest in corruption prevalence surveys, posing a significant challenge to the nation even after 75 years of independence. Regrettably, both our government and society at large have failed to reach a consensus on a unified and robust legislation with unwavering commitment and formidable implementation mechanisms to effectively control and reduce corruption. To ensure stability and progress, it is crucial to eliminate age-old financial dishonesty, especially among the higher-ranking individuals. This endeavuor necessitates comprehensive reforms within the legal framework and law enforcement agencies, complemented by resolute political dedication, to effectively dismantle the prevailing network that sustains and enables such illicit activities. Should the boss possess integrity, the subordinates are compelled to refrain from deceitfulness.

“When corruption is the priority, honesty becomes evil.”- Kangoma – Congo

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