**Imran Khan Acing the Cancel Culture**

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Cancel culture or call-out culture is a contemporary phrase used to refer to a form of ostracism in which someone is thrust out of social or professional circles – whether it be online, or in person.  Social media has been the game-changer in this regard.  The number of people who can call out others for their behaviour or words on Facebook is immense, and it’s never been easier to summon groups to join the public fray. Imran Khan has used the media and social media to cancel all political rivals, be it Musharraf, Sharifs, Bhutto or Zardari.

The Sharifs played the Punjabi card very brilliantly by rousing the Punjabi sentiment in their own favour.  Riding the wave of efficient administrative work by CM Shahbaz Sharif, they played to the gallery of the biggest province in Pakistan.  Lahore one upping Karachi in infrastructure projects ensured the electoral victory of the Sharif brothers. They did not need to do more and could safely siphon public wealth to their private accounts overseas – content with the effectiveness of their divide and rule policy.

The Sharifs’ abuse of power led to the breakup of IK’s marriage with the British socialite Jemima Goldsmith.  IK had been nursing a grudge against them ever since, it seems. Imran Khan’s sit-in protest almost ousted Nawaz when the latter returned to power in 2013.  However, other politicians saved the day for Nawaz.  When Imran’s electoral victory was announced on the floor of the parliament in 2018, he acted petty with his mudslinging directed at the Sharifs.  He was oblivious of the dignity and decorum expected of a head of state.  This was not the leader who had won over hearts, embarking on his noble mission – mainly because there was no mission beyond claiming the premiership and cancelling the enemy.

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IK cancelled Gen Musharraf, using the NRO as a swear word.  The cancel culture was best showcased in Skardu where, in 2019, Musharraf was praised on wall graffiti everywhere as Mohsin-e Gilgit Baltistan.  In 2021 the walls were clean.   Musharraf had been cancelled.  A local said it was solely due to IK’s vitriol against Musharraf. As PM, Imran Khan used Musharraf’s team and revived his projects.  IK also began the process of accountability.  Nawaz feigned illness and IK allowed him to escape to London – while still lamenting the epic tragedy of the NRO that befell the nation due to Musharraf.

Throughout his political career, IK used the word, “chor” to refer to the Sharifs, Bhuttos, Zardaris, and their henchmen. The “chor” label has reached such epic proportions that even inside the sacred premises of the Masjid-e-Nabwi, Pakistani pilgrims jeered Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif and his entourage.  This is an unforgivable violation of the sanctity of the prophet’s mosque.  IK, who plays the Islamic card, never condemned this.

Pakistan is a country, where people wear religion on their sleeves.  However, Amr bil marouf wa nahi an al munkir (enjoining good and forbidding evil) is neither preached nor practised.   Restraining the tongue, regulating the gaze and controlling the hands, are alien concepts.

Applying the cancel culture in such an environment can be truly vicious.    Pakistani cancel culture crossed all limits of decency, and violated human dignity to the nth degree, to cancel Aamir Liaquat.  He was a victim of revenge porn gone viral, yet no one defended his honour as a basic human right.

Imran Khan ought to take note that populism is a double-edged sword.  IK plays the religion card, is very opinionated, and feels free to express his views.  As the flavour of the day, IK can do no wrong. and his political groupies defend his every move- that includes his recent low blow against Maryam Nawaz.

While in office, IK had upped his blame game and assigned the moniker Cherry Blossom to Shahbaz Sharif.  The Sharifs who used to brandish the Punjabi card, are now seeing Punjabis rise against them, and terming them an “imported government.”  This is being said in the news on TV while Shahbaz Sharif is the sitting prime minister.  The self-gratifying takeaway for IK is the smug satisfaction of “canceling” all political rivals.   IK’s main goal is to eliminate all political rivals to monopolise the Pakistani political landscape.

A sage would advise him not to live in a fool’s paradise. Pakistan has hung, assassinated or ousted all its prime ministers in its 75 years of history.  It is beyond IK to break the cycle.

IK’s political groupies are middle-classed, educated and politically charged in the hopes of a better future.  However, they are naive and have misinformed views about the economy and the working of the state.   They have favourable views of IK’s first term and hence they are going all out to support him- putting up with shelling and tear gas to obediently gather en masse at D-Chowk, Islamabad. They want inflation under control, cheaper fuel, access to quality healthcare, quality education, the rule of law and an effective judicial system.  In the hopes of achieving this, they have latched on to IK’s slogan of Jihad-for-Azaadi (freedom struggle).

Pakistan is an ill-disciplined nation that seeks prosperity, security and peace, but is unwilling to make the effort required to achieve it.  Pakistanis want a just and wise ruler, while the nation acts unethically and immorally. If IK is re-elected, Pakistanis would eventually realise that he has little to offer beyond jingoism, Islamic slogans, name-calling and shifting blame.  His body of lies will not hold water for long, once he wins by a majority yet still fails to deliver on his promises.

IK has smugly exaggerated his power and prestige time and again – be it European royalty and aristocracy, Islamic nations, or urban Pakistan.   IK was snubbed by the POTUS Joe Biden.   IK was never invited to London or other western capitals.  Putin majorly disrespected IK by starting a war during his state visit to Russia.  IK was initially courted by Prince MBS of Saudi Arabia, but that went south very soon.  IK could not convince Saudia Arabia to permit him to attend a summit of 20 Islamic states in Malaysia. IK could not even win over Afghanistan, despite his many public proclamations about the US owing Afghanistan $9 billion.

IK has amazingly sold his diplomatic disasters to his mesmerised political groupies  as “a self-respecting independent foriegn policy.” IK lacks the intellectual capacity to address the structural issues which impede progress.  His tenure saw a rise in corruption. PM IK – who earlier pledged to ride a bicycle to work like the Danish Prime Minister – flew to and from his private residence in a helicopter.  This clearly establishes that he lacks the will more than he lacks the wisdom.

IK was ousted when the establishment withdrew its support.  IK’s dismissal was brought about by his irresponsible statements, which have affected Pakistan’s state relations.   The western media and India maligned Pakistan to no end after 9/11.  The establishment has worked very hard at improving Pakistan’s image in the world to save us from becoming a pariah nation.  Imran Khan’s lack of wisdom was turning Pakistan into a pariah state.  If re-elected, IK will have an uphill task of undoing past damage — for U-turns in international relations are rare.

IK himself admitted that he was asked to leave and given three options to choose his exit strategy but he did not opt for a graceful exit.   IK, in his foolhardiness, has now even taken on the military, hoping to cancel it from Pakistani power corridors.  The military, in a very wise and farsighted move, has taken a non-partisan stance.  The military top brass has officially conveyed to the nation that it will not involve itself in politics. This has been affirmed by the PTI and PML leadership. IK does not realise that the wise men in the military top brass understand that the IK phenomenon is a political suicide waiting to happen.  It is only a matter of time before his political groupies cancel him.

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