**A season of darkness, a spark of hope**

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By Raoof Hasan

“Stars, hide your fires,/ Let not light see my black and deep desires.” – Shakespeare: ‘Macbeth’

The world has been full of people nurturing dark and nauseating desires, yet it has managed to survive their lust for inexorable control. It is also right under the shadow of these dark desires that one sees goodness cultivating its progeny to continue spreading rays of light and hope.

Such are the contrasts that one learns to live with. It is Friedrich Nietzsche who captures this paradox: “I am a forest, and a night of dark trees: but he who is not afraid of my darkness, will find banks full of roses under my cypresses”.

Since forever, this fight between right and wrong, good and ugly, noble and ignoble, and kind and wicked has been raging. Countless sages have tried their desperate best, but they failed to plug the gap separating these extremities of human dispensation or save the destitute from suffering their ravages. But even when the night is at its darkest and the spirit at its weakest, there is a ray of light that will find a crevice to filter through and brighten up the path ahead.

In our own midst, it was Faiz who sensitized us to human sufferance in a way no one else has ever been able to do. He talked of luscious lips from the gallows and of undying craving to hold the beloved’s hands when one is lost in the dark of the alleys. These contrasting images, these heartbeats of emotions adorn every line that he wrote amidst coinages which are excruciating in their pain, resplendent in the hope they exude and faith they generate that things will not stay the same, that they are destined to change.

But the darkness of the night is a reality. It has an impact which may remain unfathomable and unmanageable. Many innocent lives have been sacrificed at the altar of these inexorable pangs of pain which permeate human life in a variety of ways sparking doom and destruction.

But the fight between the forces of dark and light is also a reality which, if provided direction and impetus, can alter all this in multiple ways. The pages of human history are replete with countless instances when the forces of light have triumphed over those of dark and have lit enshrining paths which have altered the fate of suffering multitudes across the world.

This is no mean achievement as one lives for its recurrence in current times that it may mitigate human sufferance and enhance the possibilities of deliverance and salvation. This undying hope keeps people alive to the prospect of change in their lives and of their coming generations. Faiz encapsulated this in his inimitable poem ‘Mulaqaat’:

“A bright horizon shall emerge from here,/ Here shall unfold the spark of sorrow,/ Like an oasis of morning glow/ And here the axes of murderous inflictions/ Lined up in multiple neat rows,/ Shall become the fiery garlands of light.”

A fierce battle is raging amidst us also between the forces of dark and light, between the forces of yesterday and tomorrow. In a way this battle is eternal, thus covered in immutable dust of times. The faces of dark are no longer vibrant as they have drunk deep of pelf and power which has tarnished their demeanours.

The forces of light, on the other hand, are exuding rays of inexorable energy and expectation at the possibilities which are dawning on the horizon, and which now appear nearer than ever in the past. But there are obstacles which the receding forces have left behind to impede the path. In the process of clearing the way forward, one is also looking deep into the vile and wicked propensities which have badgered the character and promise of this land.

While elevation of the human spirit is an unfathomable phenomenon, it is also a sad reality that its degeneration can be nauseating, the latter being on sordid display as a matter of routine in the current times. There is no end to wonderment at trying to gauge the extent of this fall in pursuit of catering to self-serving interests in preference to greater and laudatory causes impacting the fate of the state and the people.

This has forever been the story of the country. The current effort to foment a clash among state institutions is an apt reminder of this harrowing dimension to ensure that the myopic interests of the rich and the powerful are served without even a perfunctory thought given to whether the state shall be able to survive such catastrophic feud among institutions.

The manner the floor of a truncated assembly is being used to hurl abuse and invective at the judiciary and judges is abysmal. While the judiciary may need its own space to ponder its past indulgences, the effort is also gravely soiling the floor of parliament undertaking legislation that requires legitimacy as it impacts the entire country and the people.

There is not a pittance of care accorded to the myriad possible consequences of this division which can wreak havoc upon the edifice of the state. Let’s not forget that all this is being orchestrated to secure the pelf and power of a few who have accumulated it by using exclusively illegal and immoral methods. Since they have the reins of power, they believe that it is their anointed right to do as may please their whims and fancies. The tragedy is that they manage to get away with committing such and similar other gross transgressions by bending the laws of the land to suit the interests of a few.

It is thus that the country has continued to plunge deeper into the pit of ignominy. The dialogue that was instructed by the apex court, though it does not fall within its ambit of responsibilities, has gone nowhere. According to the latest input, a broad understanding has been reached on holding elections on the same day to all assemblies throughout the country, but nothing has yet been formalized regarding when the remaining assemblies will be dissolved, and the elections held. That effectively means that we are still at the starting point. So, any hope which may have been generated for a peaceful resolution of the crisis is utterly false. In the absence of any broad-spectrum agreement, the date of May 14 for elections for the Punjab Assembly will hold. But will it? Who will conduct these elections?

A season of darkness is upon us, but will the lingering spark of hope ever ignite? I shall go back to Macbeth: “Let not light see my black and deep desires.”

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