**Pakistan: Will Tomorrow be Better?**

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Ceteris paribus, free and fair general elections will be held on the eighth of February 2024 under the watchful eyes of the caretaker setup. The so-called ‘most popular’ party is trying hard to create some political space for itself. Amid an unprecedented financial crisis, the IMF review is underway. The rupee has gained strength, but inflation remains high. Lower petrol prices have failed to affect prices of consumer items. The Capital Development Authority is auctioning plots to meet the day-to-day expenses. An injectable medicine that was causing severe eye infection and sight loss has recently been recalled while the management of PIMS and Policlinic have been passed on to the army. Several teachers and clerks are on strike over the ‘unauthorised’ pension and leave rules. All undocumented individuals are packing their bags to leave Pakistan while several soldiers have been martyred in different incidents in KPK and Baluchistan.
By no means is this an ideal setting for bothering Victor Hugo or Sigmond Freud. Or is it? Nevertheless, looking at the ongoing situation, a friend feels the urgent need to watch Les Misérables and insists on the interpretation of a dream called Pakistan.
Q: The recent steps taken by Islamabad to improve governance seem to have produced some positive results. Notwithstanding the caretakers’ mandate, the credit for initiating the balancing process could go to the present setup. Do you agree with it, Sir?
VH: I believe that an intelligent hell is better than a stupid paradise. To me, putting everything in balance is good but to put everything in harmony is better. I wonder if the powerful could envision the future and see beyond the next general elections. If they do, the focus should be on improving the social sectors. He who opens a school door, closes a prison.
Q: Sir, do you think the people of Pakistan will ever have a justice system for all? A judicial setup that treats the rich and poor equally? Or do you think we have accepted the intangible yet visible distinction between the powerful and the hapless? Do the people lack the required strength to change?
VH: Nobody loves the light like the blind man. Who doesn’t want to flourish and prosper? Who doesn’t want speedy justice? The question is: how many of you are ready to sacrifice as your elders did? Let us sacrifice one day to gain perhaps a whole life. But no, by nature, we need immediate results and that too without taking the bull by the horn. It is a fact that nothing makes a man so adventurous as an empty pocket. Perhaps, that desperate situation has yet to arrive. As for people’s strength, I don’t think they lack strength. They lack will. There is a difference.
Q: Sir, you are an authority on interpretation of dreams. Give us a sense of the dream that our forefathers had in their mind of an independent country, to be ruled by its own people for the welfare of all. Do you think we are going in the right direction?
SF: Just as no one can be forced into belief, so no one can be forced into unbelief. Hence, it’s a matter of time before people are heard in the real sense of the word. The dream has already been realised. The center is covered but has somehow been placed in the periphery. No need to be hopeless as the voice of the intellect is a soft one, but it does not rest until it has gained a hearing. In that way, you may need to wait for the right time to tidy up the room. Please remember that we are what we are because we have been what we have been, and what is needed for solving the problems of human life and motives is not moral estimates but more knowledge.
Q: Sir, do you think democracy is the best form of government for Pakistan? Is there any chance we could find the correct way of governing the country in the next few decades? When would we be included in the list of so-called civilised nations? Secondly, do you think it is because our ego is bigger than our size?
SF: The civilized world? The first human who hurled an insult instead of a stone was the founder of civilization. Never judge a book by its cover. The more perfect a person is on the outside, the more demons they have on the inside. The correct way of government? Too early to say as it has been only seventy odd years. However, I feel what you need is a sense of direction. The ego aspect is a bit complicated. But I must point out that the ego is not a master in its own house. I hasten to add that the public self is a conditioned construct of the inner psychological self.
Q: Sir, when would we be able to enjoy the fruits of freedom?
SF: People do not really want freedom, because freedom involves responsibility, and most people are frightened of responsibility. However, there is no need to lose hope. From error to error, one discovers the entire truth. Out of your vulnerabilities will come your strength.
Q: Last question, Sir. Once you observed that life is a theatre set in which there are but a few practicable entrances. What in your view is the most practicable entrance for Pakistan in the comity of nations particularly from the economic point of view? Do you see any possibility of Pakistan becoming a developed country in the next three to four decades?
VH: I don’t think so. Hope alone won’t get you anywhere. Your dream must be substantiated by actions. And for that, you need visionary leadership and a responsive populace. Do you have these basic ingredients? To begin with, let us study things that are no more. It is necessary to understand them, if only to avoid them. Remember that no force can withstand the strength of an idea whose time has come.