**Thinking Men Are Dangerous**

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“What progress we are making,” Sigmund Freud complained. “In the Middle Ages,” he said, “they would have burned me. Now they are content with burning my books”. Freud forgot to recall a gigantic difference between burning one’s books and burning a living human being at the stake. The difference is remarkably evident in Gaza and in the rest of Palestine, where genocide began by liquidating the organic intellectuals alongside the infants. The grisly process is not specific to Palestine but a precondition to every genocide, throughout the world.

Wherever the voices of the intellectuals are stifled by imposing coercive silence or by hanging them on the crosses, it merely depicts that society is either fighting against its liberation from ignorance or has died because of it. The one “who searches the reason for things” Euripides says, is one of “those who bring sorrow to themselves”. Despite the fatal outcome, the species of thinkers did not vanquish, albeit sometimes they had to make certain compromises with the ruling class, replacing a war of manoeuvre with a Gramscian war of position. When one is a victim of constant bombardment, Ilan Pappe says, it is time to seek shelter, to postpone the struggle to some other time because the duration of bombardment is never long. Nevertheless, there are countries where occupation and the threat of bombardment never cease. Gaza is one example and incidents akin to it are not uncommon in the land of the pure.

Akin to the gory history of Palestine, Pakistani history did not begin in this month when a distinguished academic was hunted down by the forces abhorring enlightenment. For Nietzsche, such forces preach death in the shape of eternal life. They can only be tolerated “if… they pass quickly”. The bite of their conscience he says, teaches men to bite. And “not a few who sought to cast away their devils”, he adds, “entered into the swine themselves”.

Barring teaching a universally recognized scientific truth, was there any other taboo under threat, which invited the ire of the vigilantes against the academic? For the lack of scientific evidence, the idea of immaculate conception has been proven wrong and has been interred deep into the ground by the Western world. Even in the US, which is an Anglicized state, Darwinism alone commands authenticity and is taught in high schools and above. The teaching of immaculate conception is officially banned in Australian and British institutions.

“There is something rotten in the state of Denmark,” in Hamlet Shakespeare alludes to. Teaching Darwinism may not be the only reason for the humiliation and disgrace piled upon Professor Sher Ali. There is certainly something more to it, than what meets the eye. Professor Sher Ali was a victim of an assault carried out by religious vigilantes, but the fingerprints of the deep state were all over it. There is a historical similarity between the tragedy he suffered and the one Orlando Letelier, a foreign minister and later an ambassador of Chile’s elected Marxist government led by President Allende, had to go through. Letelier was killed in a terrorist attack in Washington DC when a bomb tied under his car exploded. Letelier and one of his comrades perished instantaneously because his assassin Pinochet left nothing to chance, while the lady luck-or probably the assassins-smiled on Sher Ali who survived but not before losing one of his legs.

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The academic, as the information about his activities trickled down, was involved in many “subversive” activities such as opposing the Taliban, supporting women’s rights, and cultivating infidelity in students’ minds encouraging them to develop critical thinking. “Cassius has a lean and hungry look,” Caesar told Antonio “He thinks too much: such men are dangerous”. The clergy knew it by instinct. Unlike Caesar, it refused to take any chances of an impending threat. “Where one can go and scream? It is an existential question,” the distinguished psychologist RD Laing inquires. There is a scarce cathartic space available to the nonconformists both in Pakistan and India. Time has proved that freedom is on the retreat in the world. “The more sand has escaped from the hourglass of our life, the clearer we could see through it” Sartre was succinct.

Pierre Bourdieu once aptly commented that “both academic and cultural products represent not only political and social transformations but also economic products that need to be marketed”. Marcuse has put it even better, for him, those who create jobs create minds first. All industrially developed societies face a dilemma. On one hand, they require knowledgeable youth relying heavily on scientific thoughts, a key to progress, on the other they need unthinking consumers to buy and utilize the waste as commodities. The dialectics work strangely. Marx was right when he gave credit to capitalism by reckoning its potential to develop productive forces. However, its ultimate limitation in the development of the productive forces brings forth its gravediggers.

In the countries afflicted by peripheral capitalism, the native capitalist class merely fights for its survival. Instead of controlling the social function, it needs the support of even more regressive classes, which form the core of the repressive institution to impose its hegemony and domination over the masses. Religion becomes an important tool to coerce people into submission. The over-reliance upon the repressive apparatus of the state gives the praetorian guards direct access to power. In a security state created in the name of religion, the latter becomes an instrument to bludgeon the people into conformity. Enlightenment through scientific education is found and deemed unnecessary. The academics become the soft targets who can be arm-twisted and tortured into submission by the auxiliary forces.

The shocking scenes of a helpless academic escorted by the ‘redeemers and guardians” of religion to the office of a bureaucrat not only reminded one of the unfathomable shallowness of a decadent society but also reminded one of Bertolt Brecht’s sayings. “Why send out the murderers,” he says, “when one can employ bailiffs”, the word bailiffs can easily be replaced with vigilantes. In decadent societies, the replay of hideous images of Zio-Nazism is not uncommon. The confected outrage of the vigilantes was bizarre. They were playing to the gallery, gratifying their academic impotence by substituting it with religious omnipotence.

The vigilantes, both in Pakistan and India, play on the primitive emotions of their followers. Politics and patriotism are emotions, but for Gramsci, they merely act as a façade of history. Human history “throughout centuries, he says, can only be explained by the changing, constantly renewed interplay of material causes”. In capitalism, there are no free emotions. Behind all emotions, economics plays a vital role. All vigilantes dance to the tune of the divine gospel, the other name of this commodity is capital.

The mistreatment of the academic has once again revealed the face of a society that has been turned into a cadaver waiting to be buried alongside its redeemers. The academic has lost nothing because “no price” Nietzsche says, “is too high to pay for the privilege of owning yourself” and those who laugh at him have not yet heard the bad news, Brecht adds.

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