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MORE than a decade ago, an article had appeared in this paper in which it was argued that change in Sindh was inevitable as greater awareness would prevent regression. However, my contention was that a middle class leadership, a symbol of change, had not been allowed to rise in Sindh and thus it was too early to hope for change. Indeed, Sindh remains mired in economic deprivation, political illusions and social discontent.

Its political strata — rural and urban — is riddled with greed. Politics in KP, once considered the domain of the Khans and Arbabs, is dictated by the mullahs and middle-class cadre. Parts of the Pakhtun belt of northern Balochistan are influenced by religious parties and the rest of the province is simmering with a sense of deprivation, discrimination and victimisation which is strengthening nationalist sentiments and loosening the grip of the sardars. The rapid growth of industrialisation and farm mechanisation in Punjab has boosted the emerging role of the middle class in politics. But Sindh appears to be going in a different direction, from democratic to ‘aristocratic’ rule.

After Pakistan’s creation, the Communist Party was activated in Sindh under the leadership of Hassan Nasir. Enlightened Sindhi students like Noorudin Sarki joined it to strengthen the cause of the voiceless. But a ban on the teaching of Sindhi language in non-Sindhi schools created divisions in Sindhi-Mohajir unity, and many joined the movement for the restoration of the pre-partition status of the Sindhi language. This was followed by a struggle for the revival of Sindh’s provincial status, which took a hit after the declaration of One Unit. The gap widened further when vested interests conspired to form a Mohajir-Punjabi-Pathan alliance in the 1960s to sabotage the campaign for the breakup of One Unit.

The urban progressive cadre of students supported Hassan Nasir. Even after his extrajudicial killing, they remained committed to his cause, for which many were tortured and imprisoned. It was in the late 1960s that some of them, attracted by the slogan of ‘roti, kapra aur makan’, joined the PPP, while others aligned themselves with the National Awami Party. After the breakup of One Unit, Jam Saqi and his associates reactivated the Communist Party, for which he and others like Sohail Sangi, Prof Jamal Naqvi, Kamal Warsi and Amar Lal were tortured and jailed. Like Shaheed Hassan Nasir, youngsters including Nazeer Abbasi, Hameed Baloch, Nasir Baloch and Ayaz Samo paid the ultimate price during Zia’s regime.

Unity is needed for Sindh to progress.

Saner elements in Sindh had pinned hopes on the MQM, which enjoyed support in Karachi and Hyderabad, but its leadership has always aligned itself with the corridors of power, leaving the people in the lurch. Meanwhile, the entire political leadership of rural Sindh, after the migration of the Hindu middle class, was taken over by Muslim feudal families, many of whom, with the passage of time, came to sit in the lap of the state’s power wielders.

Various groups emerged after the breakup of One Unit was achieved, but there has been consensus on Sindh’s basic rights: ending the shortage of water, enhancing electricity and gas supply, increasing employment opportunities, settling ownership of the islands, curbing exploitation of natural resources, addressing the question of dams and, last but not least, ending the usurpation and colonisation of villages by controversial real estate entities. Un­­fortunately, Sindh’s ruling elite is joined by the neo-breed of waderas, nawabzadas, sardarzadas, and lately ‘NABzadas’, the latter released under plea bargains and ‘voluntary’ return of a fraction of the total amount of looted public money.

Despite the fact that the PPP has been in power in Sindh for the last 15 years, nothing has been done to alleviate the suffering of the people: the poor handling of the flood situation is one example. The MQM’s role is also disappointing. It enjoyed absolute power under Gen Musharraf and was a coalition partner until recently, but has been unable to achieve much in the way of strengthening public education or technical training — the basic tools to combat illiteracy and poverty. The credit for launching mega development projects in Karachi and Hyderabad goes to Gen Musharraf.

Sindh’s prosperity lies in the unity of the Sindhi- and Urdu-speaking masses, which cannot be achieved without quality education, tolerance, removal of discord and a joint struggle for achieving common goals. Serious dialogue is the need of the hour for a peaceful and prosperous Sindh.

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