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**The nation-state and the new Left**

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Fiefdom is generally conceived as an archaic concept of political control associated with some pre-modern feudal society only. However, it also exists in our modern political spaces where political control is exercised through legal and structural instruments.

In ancient societies, fiefdom was exercised by feudal lords to control their estates and its subjects to extract maximum economic value from enslaved labor. However, in our modern nation-states both political control and the extraction of economic value are carried out through benign legal, economic and institutional mechanisms.

Many people may disagree with this standpoint because for them modern political spaces are governed by the rational choices of individuals more than the will of powerful groups. It is about promoting and protecting the universal civil rights through creation of spaces for civic engagement so that the state becomes accountable to its people.

It may look even bizarre to compare the methods of political control employed in the ancient world with that of the constitutional governance of the modern nation-state. In the ancient world, powerful feudal lords and religious clergy reinforced political control by subjugating the people through direct use of force. In our modern nation-state, the use of force to maintain public order is governed by a legal and constitutional framework more than the outright subjugation of masses. The feudal lords and clergy worked in unison to exert political control in the ancient world without any legal and political checks while the modern world is characterized by the legislature, judiciary and administration as three distinct pillars of governance within a nation-state.

However, legal and constitutional governance – with which a nation-state was identified – has been jeopardized with the rise of right-wing politics across the world. Today the role of the nation-state has been reduced to legislate and implement immigration rules to restrict the movement of the working class in these times of economic and political crises. The nation-state does not hold control over economic policy, which for the most part is formulated by the global financial institutions to facilitate the free movement of capital and to bail out large corporations with public money when the crisis of their own making sets in.

When the economic crisis hit the world in 2008, wealthy bankers were bailed out with public money while the poor were left to mourn over their helplessness. While the nation-state has failed even to exercise its constitutionalism, the movements of the anti-status quo are taking a new shape to not only question the relevance of a defunct nation-state but also to call for a new social contract.

Anti-globalization protests started to galvanize transnational solidarity when they emerged on the international scene in 1999, from Seatle to Davos, to call for an inclusive and equalitarian global order. In recent days, we have also seen a new wave of anti-status quo movements in France, Chile, India, Singapore and Pakistan to call for a new social contract. The nation-state has continued to disappoint its citizens by making alliances with rich corporations to suppress the popular aspiration of constitutional supremacy and restoration of key functions of the nation state.

Well, the nation-state is a product of capitalism and it has played a pivotal role to deflect the revolutionary zeal of people through a constitutional veneer and social welfare. The irony is that the nation-state today has failed even to perform its historical role of mystifying the irreconcilable political and economic conflict between the ruling class and the ruled. It has failed to even mystify the rising conflict and dilute public anger against the naked exploitation of neoliberalism.

Today, the nation-state is viewed as a political liability by both global corporations as well as citizens-led movements for the restoration of constitutional and political framework of representation. The recent wave of political protests in India against the controversial citizens act have also questioned the right-wing economic agenda, increasing disparity, rising unemployment and Modi’s unconditional allegiance to free trade regime.

While it has become obvious that the nation-state will not be able to perform its constitutional and legal role, most of the left-leaning political parties today seems to be obsessed with the restoration of constitutional rights through a bourgeoisie state. While most of the social democratic parties of the past have now made new alliances with global capitalism, the Left seems to be losing its discursive rigour and political space in the newly emerging anti-globalization consensus.

In Pakistan too, the political left has become diluted in the amorphous movements of popular republicanism – ranging from restoration of constitutionalism to rights-based civil society agitations. The real space to fight against a subjugated state and neoliberal globalism is left to the religious right and political moralists. As ‘civil rights activists’, most Left activists look like the advocates of republicanism more than the representatives of the working class.

Global corporates in the era of neoliberalism would be happy to deal with religious outfits by turning them into proxies of their economic wars while a strong Left will always be a thorn in the flesh of neoliberalism. The new Left does not seem to make any strong impact in shaping the discourse of resistance and politics in the age of internationalism other than fighting the war to salvage the constitutionalism of a crumbling nation-state. This adherence to state nationalism and entry into electoral politics, while both have lost their political appeal, is not a smart political move.

Do we still think that the modern nation-state is synonymous with an overarching entity of universal suffrage, constitutional governance and popular aspiration of collective and individual freedoms and choices?

When we define the nation-state as a geographical and political domain of unique identity of a people we assume that it is the ultimate autonomous, sovereign and an all-encompassing institution to safeguard the collective as well as the individual interests of all citizens. In theory, this conceptualization of the nation-state makes sense but in practice does not help much as far as the protection and propagation of freedoms concern.

Nation-states have increasingly become irrelevant in defining the national and global political and economic policies. The nation-state has become only a repository of political instrument of control – the security apparatus which can be deployed to oppress dissent rather than protect diversity. Global economic and political policy is formulated by transitional interests which are essentially diffused across the vast spectrum of nation-states. Global corporate entities have outgrown the traditional strong states and they are the key movers and shakers of international relations today.

From the Far East economic crisis of 1997 to the recent global standoff vis-à-vis the Syrian and Iranian crises, the role of the nation-state has been neutralized by the transnational entities as key players of regional security and political stability/instability. While citizens find it extremely difficult to hold accountable a defunct and ineffective nation-state, the Left must rethink its allegiance with state nationalism. This is time that the Left should reorganize itself for a larger fight against the emerging fiefdoms of neoliberalism beyond the nation-state.

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