**[The oppressor and the oppressed](https://www.dawn.com/news/1628005/the-oppressor-and-the-oppressed)**

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THE connection between the oppressor and the oppressed is as old as human history. Centuries of imperialism, the post-World War II Bretton Woods economic system, and the current WTO-led hyper-liberalised trade regime have treated human beings as objects of domination. These systems have exploited the fundamental rights of billions of marginalised people across the globe who suffer from poverty, hunger, disease and ignorance.

Ironically, after independence from the colonial powers, leading state and non-state actors in most underdeveloped countries conspired to carry forward the colonial legacy of oppression of their countrymen for many years to come. The principles of egalitarianism, freedom, altruism and equity have failed to gather pace in these societies. In contrast, the oppressive trends of violence, corruption and despotism, as well as the spoils system have become the norm.

Brazilian educator-philosopher Paulo Freire was among the earliest individuals to present development as freedom. In his lifetime (1921-1997), he became a global icon for social movements against poverty, oppression and discrimination. Through his masterpiece Pedagogy of the Oppressed, he probes psychological and cultural barriers to personal liberation. Decades after his death, his remarkable concepts of education on fatalism, internalisation of oppression, fake generosity, distorted view of God, and awakening of critical consciousness continue to be the inspiration that unshackles the minds of the poor and leads them towards personal and national development.

In our country, landless peasants and mill workers are helpless before feudal lords and industrialists. Influential land grabbers have occupied millions of acres of state land. However, the state, intentionally or unintentionally, has failed to take back these lands from illegal occupiers and hand them over to poor peasants who have been the natural protectors and users of these lands since centuries. Some industrialists and businessmen are powerful and manipulate state policies and prevent farmers from demanding a reasonable price for their produce. The same industrialists deprive their workers of social security benefits and safe working conditions. The government should facilitate the business community by giving them concessions to foster exports and economic growth, but at the same time, the latter must also be bound to pay taxes and ensure the welfare of their workers.

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Women in Pakistan are oppressed at the hands of the patriarchy and hostile orthodox social forces, which have restricted their role in national development. Women are not allowed to make significant decisions related to their life. Despite the importance of their reproductive role they do not enjoy autonomy over resources.

The low rate of labour force participation for women in Pakistan has substantially impacted the country’s GDP. The implementation of women’s protection laws is weak. Even the formulators and implementers of these laws, including the politicians, clergy and police, mock these laws in cases of reported violence against women.

Status quo is the ugliest expression of oppression in the life of nations. In this process, the oppressors resist change because it directly hurts their interests and causes ripples in the decades-old state of stagnancy. In fact, the public interest should be superior to institutional and individual interests. But being a product of our past and present circumstances, we are merely concerned with self-aggrandisement. We have institutions that have been resisting democratic values to flourish on the pretext that the majority of our public is naïve and lacks the sense to elect the right people to lead them. A few colonial-era government organisations are damaging the public interest by ignoring the ideals of modern governance and limiting the role of specialists in state affairs. They consistently oppose the devolution of powers to the elected representatives of far-off small regions for their short-term interests.

Around two million cases are lying pending in our courts — from the district judiciary to the Supreme Court. Every day, hundreds of thousands of people are ‘plundered’ on court premises due to poor control and coordination between the bar and bench, and inefficient executing agencies, especially the police. These entities delay the dispensation of justice. Then, we have a very influential non-state institution called the clergy, which exploits the religious sentiments of the ignorant youth for political and economic gains and reinforces polarisation and extremism in society. This kind of relationship between our institutions and the public is a part of a sadistic drive, and according to Paulo Freire, “sadistic love is a perverted love — a love of death, not life”.

Nations grow with age. After 74 years, we have been dwarfed on all fronts. When it comes to human development in Pakistan, all those in power who were supposed to bring reformative change to society are not ready to accept their strategic miscalculations and faults which they have committed; instead, they blame each other for the perpetual tragedy that is the lot of the masses.

We need an education system that can trigger a “critical and liberating dialogue” with the oppressed majority to inform them that their hunger, ignorance, and deprivations are socially constructed phenomena. Education as a practice of freedom, according to Freire, should not serve the interests of the oppressors. He is against the “banking model of education”, which inhibits critical thinking and treats people as things or containers to receive or pour in information.

How can we start liberating processes at our schools? For this purpose, the foremost requirement is motivated teachers alongside a curriculum based on logic and truthfulness. But, the majority of our teachers have many issues. They are financially stressed and socially desperate. A local NGO reports that more than 70 per cent of teachers in government and private schools believe that corporal punishment improves students’ performance. With this mindset, teachers themselves become a part of fear and oppression. So how can they initiate a liberating dialogue with our future?

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