**The Siege From Within**

[M Alam Brohi](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/m-alam-brohi/)

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We have been celebrating 23 March as our National Day every year since the day, the unwell and fragile Quaid, a man of irreproachable integrity and indomitable will, bequeathed to us an independent and sovereign country, and renew our pledge to make Pakistan a liberal, democratic and progressive country. But we, as a nation, have left no stone unturned in degrading this beloved land.

The country has been under the siege of predators tearing it asunder bit by bit since its inception. The secular and liberal political ideals of the founding father were discarded soon after his demise by adopting the objectives Resolution in October 1948 as the preamble of the Constitution yet to be written by the Constituent Assembly. The Constitution that saw the light of day after nine years in 1956 was aborted in October 1958 before elections could be held and a representative government established under it. A unique federal country like Pakistan – the two wings of which were separated by 1000 miles of the Indian Territory, badly needed participatory democracy.

The state resources were audaciously captured by the elite created by the British Imperialists through political patronage. The lot included landlords, feudal chiefs, sardars, sajadahnashins, and bureaucrats and generals trained in the Indian Civil Service and Military Academies and their successors. They colluded with military dictators, civilian autocrats, fake democrats, demagogues and populists jumping on the bandwagon of every popular political party. They besieged the country and their siege has ever been tightening. The country is threatened by this siege from within more than any power from without.

Our journalists, analysts, intellectuals, writers, and historians shy away from telling inconvenient truths.

What do we have to showcase to the world or to be proud of as an independent, sovereign and progressive nation – constitutional rule, democracy, prosperity, food and water security, education, healthcare, justice, rule of law, equality before the law, social and economic equity, fundamental rights? We have none of these hallmarks. Throughout the past seven decades, We have helplessly witnessed political chaos, autocracy, repressive military rule, farce referendums, managed elections, economic slide down, corruption, coercive policing, cruel feudal raj, gender inequality, social and economic deprivation, planned stratification of society with a banal of thugs possessing all wealth, perks and powers sitting on the summit, a minor chunk precariously hanging on the middle and the teeming majority at the bottom of the social pyramid – condemned to work from dawn to dusk along with their women and children just for two square meals, face health hazards and the misery of poverty and helplessness, and see their children out of school.

The ruling class has no concern for the fate of this teeming majority. The spiritual leaders and Moulvis that have been in cahoots with the ruling elite tell them that poverty and affluence are preordained by the will of the Sovereign. The common populace forming over 75% of our huge population lived in thatched huts or straw-roofed one-room shelters 70 years ago and they continue having the same dwellings, even today. No change has occurred in their living conditions. They work as serfs on big farming estates of the landed gentry. The land reforms under Ayub Khan and Z.A. Bhutto were eyewash.

The cunning rulers of Sindh hailing from the landed class attributed the recent flash floods to the will of God disguising their criminal acts of obstructing the natural paths for the flow of flood waters to save their crops and fish farms. We have reduced the poor class to beggars. They flock to the distribution centres to have one flour bag free or at a discounted rate. Some die of dehydration. The weak and old are crushed in stampedes. Their women give birth on footpaths and their children die of rabies for want of vaccines or malnutrition. Based on the statistics of two hospitals in Karachi, 129 lives were lost to rabies during the past decade in Sindh. Complete data from all over the province will reveal a painful and alarming situation.

Pakistan has always been threatened by the right to expression or intellectual honesty. Our journalists, analysts, intellectuals, writers, and historians shy away from telling inconvenient truths. Hypocrisy has overwhelmed every segment of society. It is difficult, if not impossible, to separate the wheat from the chaff. We have eroded the inviolability of the Constitution calling it contemptuously a piece of few pages. Repeated constitutional transgressions were indemnified by the parliament and judiciary filled with men of straw. No violator of the Constitution has ever been punished in the country. The affluent elite, the ruling class and powerful state institutions remain beyond the grip of law.

The Bengalis, whom we relished to call contemptuously as ‘ugly and dirty’ when they shared Pakistan with us, have since established civilian supremacy by making the violators of the Constitution account for their transgressions. Bangladesh today, notwithstanding the autocratic complexion of the Awami League rule, is much ahead of us in political and economic stability with expanding exports, foreign exchange reserves and per-capita income.

The narrative of respect for institutions keeps reverberating in our country. The state institutions have constitutional responsibilities to discharge honestly and impartially to earn public applause and respect. The parameters of their authority and responsibilities are clearly defined by the Constitution. They have to work within those constitutional parameters treating the Constitution as supreme for the state to be functioning smoothly. The Constitution being the basic law ensures meaningful collaboration and coordination among the state institutions and the federation and components, and underwrites the rights of the rich and poor, workers and worked for, powerful and powerless, ruler and ruled, state and citizen.

The asphyxiation of this hapless nation by the elite has gone beyond all decency and endurance. In the 1970 crisis, we had the four provinces of West Pakistan to survive as the new Pakistan. What now? This siege has to be broken if we want to see Pakistan survive as a sovereign country. This is the patriotic cri de coeur of the shirtless Pakistanis and the real owners of this land.

*The author was a member of the Foreign Service of Pakistan and he has authored two books.*