**Pakistan: facts and fiction**

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Although Pakistanis usually celebrate Independence Day with fervour, this time around there was more jubilation in the air as the PTI government has taken the helm. The party’s has many zealous and fierce workers who celebrated the 72nd Independence Day with enthusiasm.

How do we feel on Independence Day? What ideas, thoughts, memories of the past, and questions about the future come to mind? The question of who we are and what has become of us looms large. We are among the very few countries in the world that even seven decades after their creation are still debating who the country was created for.

There are considerable differences on these fundamental issues. Some powerful elements within the country don’t want us to raise these questions. They simply want us to celebrate Independence Day as naive patriots without questioning the meaning and purpose of being patriotic.

The nation-state has become a kind of godly concept that ought to be fought and died for. Such perceptions of nation-states overlook the sociopolitical context, development of political societies, and the constant power struggle among various players and pillars that makes weaker elements victims for several decades.

While contemplating writing about Independence, a writer in these trying times has to bear in mind that he/she must write something which can be published without the risk of inviting the wrath of powerful segments. In these times, the warriors are no longer the traditional right-wing activists and ideologues. They seem to have changed their form.

Hailing from Sindh, I often end up examining the past, present and future of Pakistan from a Sindhi perspective. Is it wrong or dangerous to observe the country through this lens?

Sindh joined Pakistan mainly because the Muslim League (ML) wanted a federal state. Fearing the Congress Party’s centrist politics and permanent Hindu majority, the Sindh Muslim League trusted the ML’s promise of autonomy that was envisioned in the Lahore Resolution of 1940.

This is a resolution that we Pakistanis love to celebrate. But no mainstream parties want to talk about why our country’s constitution isn’t in line with the Lahore Resolution.

The Muslim League failed to honour its own Lahore Resolution. In fact, soon after the creation of Pakistan, the ML was rendered irrelevant by the civil and military bureaucracy. Soon after the creation of the country, Sindh lost Karachi when the city became the capital. When Sindh’s chief minister opposed this decision, he was removed; our historic Sindh University was also shifted to Jamshoro near Hyderabad. Later, General Ayub Khan imposed the One Unit Policy, abolishing Sindh as a province. This was arguably a sinister act that shocked Sindh’s people.

Seventy years down the road, some political elements are once again talking about carving out a new province within Sindh. They don’t understand that Sindh isn’t an administrative unit. It is the historic homeland of the people of Sindh. The province wasn’t created by Pakistan. Sindh, along with the other federating units, created Pakistan. It is dangerous to talk about tampering with Sindh’s political geography. Some politicians are using these divisive strategies to sustain their political future – which, in fact, isn’t working for them.

Let’s put aside the views of left-leaning writers and intellectuals for now and simply consider the outlook of those who have served the state by holding powerful positions. Roedad Khan, a long-serving bureaucrat, reached a bleak conclusion about the state of affairs in the country – as reflected in the title of his book ‘Pakistan: a dream gone sour’.

In order to get some perspective on the country’s past and present, it is often interesting to just consider the titles of the books written by those who have worked in their respective fields for the country’s progress. This reminds me of Sherbaz Khan Mazari’s book ‘A journey to Disillusionment’, which he wrote after giving up on a political career following a long struggle.

I am deliberately not mentioning the books written by G M Syed (who presented the resolution in the Sindh Assembly for the creation of Pakistan, and ended up spending 28 years of his life in prison). I have also refrained from mentioning the books penned by Bacha Khan, Khan Abdul Wali Khan and Baloch leaders whose story has been reduced to a version of history that the rest of the country is in complete denial about.

The distortion and suppression of historical facts, movements and struggle has become our collective legacy. This is how we thrive and celebrate as a people and country. This is the foundation that we have built using all possible means, including Twitter.

On the economic front, Dr Ishrat Hussain’s book, ‘Pakistan: An Elitist Economy’, and many studies carried out by the Social Policy Development Center (SPDC) and the Social Development Policy Institute (SDPI) paint a picture of Pakistan that is similar to that of many other postcolonial countries. Military rule and dominance was once seen as a cold-war phenomenon that was pampered by the West. But these structures continue to thrive in some parts of the world and Pakistan happens to be one country where they are still in vogue.

Amid the prevailing jubilant mood, critical thinking has become a crime. A class that controls the state apparatus wants to celebrate freedom without understanding the meaning of freedom. However, some of us have now come to terms with how to be free by switching sides and becoming part of grand schemes of complete subjugation.

Many have seen the third consecutive transfer of power to a civilian government as a major milestone, ignoring the circumstances and controls that went into it. This only tells us that the ‘playbook’ has become more creative with the help of technology. In essence, it is the same old country that is in the hold of dominant powers and class.

To confront lies and distortions, we need someone like Asma Jahangir. Will our society produce defenders of constitutional rights and civilian spaces in the face of blatant attacks from media warriors who create alternative facts in the same way that Trump’s team does? This is the question that could empower an enlightened society to bounce back and at least keep the other narrative alive and relevant.

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