**The trial and execution of Bhutto**

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The 4th of April brings back the painful memories of the farce trial and judicial murder of an iconic son of Pakistan – Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. Bhutto after his exit from the Ayub Cabinet had emerged the most popular leader after Quaid e Azam and, notwithstanding his unfulfilled promises with the masses, had genuinely earned the title of the Quaid e Awam. We were in the Civil Service Academy when the former President and Prime Minister; the savior of the so called new Pakistan; the architect of the 1973 Constitution and the Parliamentary democracy, was sent to the gallows after a mock and dubious judicial trial.

What didn’t Bhutto do for the remainder of the country? Moving like a hurricane, he was constantly audible and incessantly visible in virtually collecting its broken pieces to rebuild it. He restored its confidence and prestige in the comity of nations turning it into a constitutional and parliamentary democratic state. He impregnated its defence by replenishing and modernizing the military arsenal and launching a fast developing nuclear program. He addressed all the post war issues with India with honour and dignity. He faced the ruthless Indira Gandhi as the leader of a proud and resilient nation rather than the representative of a defeated and humiliated nation. He astounded experienced diplomats and leaders by achieving all that otherwise seemed impossible to be conceded to by the Indian leadership without a heavy quid pro quo.

He deserved a fair and gentlemanly treatment. But his nemesis was a small, spiteful and vindictive man. His hatred for Bhuttos knew no bounds. He was seized with fear of Bhutto. His fear was fuelled by the politicians around him. They proved to be men of straw, narrow, small, shortsighted, and equally fearful of Bhutto. They wanted to see Bhutto physically eliminated. No point of naming the leaders who counseled the revengeful General to eliminate Bhutto. It seemed the pulpit, politicians, Generals and Justices all had banded closely to extinguish the life of this man who had been involuntarily radiating revolutionary light and hope among the poor masses. They could not foresee that Bhutto fallen would be stronger than Bhutto erect. He would rule Pakistan from his grave.

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After the execution of Bhutto, the General began betraying his true colours. He tempered with the ideals, ideology and direction of the country. A hell was let loose on the country. Political activists and journalists were arrested, flogged, humiliated and imprisoned; speeches of the Quaid e Azam censored; the history books and school and university syllabuses rewritten; the laws of the country replaced by seven century edicts and the religion was grossly abused and sectarianism promoted to solidify personal rule. The country was turned into a theocratic state and plunged as the frontline state into the American war in Afghanistan. The constitution was mutilated to the extent of unrecognizability.

While reflecting on this consequential phase of our national history, all conscious citizens of this country traverse a stream of shaking, sudden and violent turns of history of Pakistan including the imposition of the infamous One-Unit in 1954 and later the Martial Law of October 1958. The period that followed was considered relatively stable. However, the veneer of the stability and development that was trumpeted by Goebbels of the regimebegan unraveling with the advent of the presidential elections of 1964 in which the autocratic rule of Ayub Khan was challenged by the sister of the founder of Pakistan, Muhtarma Fatima Jinnah rallying the political forces of the country for the restoration of plural democracy.

The democratic movement was overtaken by the 1965 war with India and the subsequent talks with the Indian leaders in Tashkent through the mediation of the Soviet leaders. The Field Marshal emerged as a weak leader from the Tashkent Agreement gradually losing his grip on the levers of power. The agitational politics that ensued forced him to hand over power to his inept Commander in Chief, General Yahya Khan in March 1969. However, his authoritative rule and biased and myopic policies from October 1958 to March 1969 supplemented by the political blunders of the past leadership had already alienated the Bengali population of Pakistan and heightened the sense of deprivation in the smaller provinces of West Pakistan.

The so called fair and transparent general elections held for the first time on the basis of adult franchise in the country in December 1970 brought a bigger tragedy in their wake culminating in the violent secession of the eastern wing of the country leaving the western part in a thick fog of chaos and confusion. The death of the Jinnah’s Pakistan left the nation in a somber and despairing mood. No one was confident of the survival of the remainder of Pakistan as a country. This was the first time, many Pakistanis cried over the defeat and breakage of the country at the hands of its arch enemy. The cumulative consequences of the senseless political and economic policies pursued by the ruling clique combined with thechauvinism, condescension and hauteur which we used to treat the Bengalis with, had contributed more to the secession of the eastern wing than the military intervention of India.

We started with a renewed energy to rebuild our new Pakistan. However, with our proverbial short memory, we forgot our history leave alone learning any lesson from it. The democratic governments of National Awami Party in Balochistan and KPK were dismissed in July 1972. Again, a military operation was ordered to subdue the ensuing violent Baloch protests. This was the third security operation against the Baloch. The earlier two operations in which Baloch leaders were imprisoned and executed were still fresh in the Baloch minds. Later, the Baloch and Pashtun leaders of National Awami Party were charged with sedition and imprisoned in Hyderabad to be tried by a Special Tribunal. The most saddening thing was that all this happened under the democratic government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.

(To be concluded)

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