**Interesting reads**

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Since the past few weeks, election campaigns had hijacked the media. From morning till evening, the media showed nothing else but party leaders using dirty language against each other and blaming each other for all imaginable and unimaginable crimes. All norms of decency and professionalism had long flown out the window.

Many predictions were made, but elections and cricket are much the same, as expectations are often not realised. Despite forecasts, past US presidential elections caused many surprises when Truman defeated Dewey, Clinton defeated Bush Sr, Obama defeated Bush Jr and, most recently, the shocking defeat of Hillary Clinton against Donald Trump.

Trump’s win did not come as a surprise to me. The American psyche is such that it likes ‘different’ personalities. I am convinced that had Raymond Davis (who killed two men in Lahore) stood for the governorship of a state, he would have won. All he would have had to do was tell prospective voters how he shot down two Pakistani criminals who were about to attack him.

However, this column is about some interesting books, the first of which is a rather traumatic read. It is titled ‘Era of Darkness: The British Empire in India’, and has been written by Shashi Tharoor, a former Indian Union Minister. I heard him speak for the first time at an Oxford Union gathering. It was a treat to listen to his highly articulate, fluent English, spoken in a graceful and refined manner. At the gathering, Tharoor eloquently presented the case for the UK to compensate India for its horrendous rule, murders, exploitation and the loot and plunder of wealth that it committed. The book gives extensive information on the manipulations and intrigues used by the British to occupy India.

At that time, India was one of the richest countries of the world. All the wealth – gold, ornaments and jewels – was taken from local rulers and transported to the UK. Even the famous Kohinoor diamond, which now decorates the Queen’s royal crown, was taken from India. This book is an eye opener. People my age know most of the history, but our younger generation tends to see only the positive side of the British, while in fact, it can safely be said that the British Empire was built on the bodies, bones and blood of not only Indians but also Africans.

Tharoor’s book is a treasure of knowledge on British, Indian and Pakistani history. It is a must-read for all students and scholars of history and international relations. The book has been published by the Aleph Book Company (Rupa Publications India). Other than the cover picture which shows a British soldier on horseback trying to kill a fallen Indian, there are no other pictures of British cruelty, violence or massacre of innocent, unarmed Indians. In the annals of history, probably no other nation has been as cruel, exploitive, intriguing and murderous as the British were for hundreds of years.

Another distressing read is a history book in Urdu titled ‘Muslim Hukumatain: Kesi Balandi, Kesi Pasti’ (Muslim Dynasties: What Glory and What Downfall), written by Raziuddin Syed and published by the Jinnah Thinkers Forum Karachi. Syed is a prolific writer and has written more than 20 books on diverse and interesting topics. He mentioned many books which he consulted for this work. Some of these are: ‘What Went Wrong’ by Bernard Lewis; ‘History of the Fall and Decline of the Roman Empire’ by Edward Gibbon; ‘History of the Arabs’ by Philip K HiHi; ‘The Political Rise and Fall of the Muslims’ by Karen Armstrong; ‘The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers’ by Paul Kennedy; ‘The Crisis of Islam’ by Bernard Lewis; ‘The Rise and Fall of the Muslims’ by Prof Maulana Saeed Ahmad Akbar Abadi; as well as many other Urdu books and translations by various authors. This book is a must read for all students of history – especially Muslim history.

I couldn’t help but notice that Syed had missed a very important book, namely: ‘Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity and Poverty’ by Prof Acemoglu and Prof Robinson. The contents of this book apply, without exception, to all nations and countries that fail. It shows that a nation owes its rise to its leaders – read Hazrat Umar (RA) and Hazrat Umar bin Abdul Aziz (RA) –, and its fall to corrupt, incompetent rulers and their advisors – read the Mughal rulers in India and Muslim rulers in Spain and Central Asia. Morally corrupt rulers prefer to surround themselves by similar sycophants and manage to manipulate things in such a way so as to get rid of all the competent, able and honest bureaucrats.

However, rather sooner than later such kingdoms/dynasties fall and then there is a hue and cry from the leaders – as was from the last Muslim ruler in Spain when he was deported to Morocco. People never learn from history and think the same fate won’t overcome them. Muslims seem to top this list of denial. In the Muslim world, there is currently a ray of hope in Turkey under President Recip Tayyip Erdogan. May the Almighty guide him to lead his nation to its past glory. Amen.

Tailpiece: Prof Albert Einstein had predicted the consequences of technological development (mobile phones) and its effect on social and family life. He forecast that technology would replace human interactions on all levels (whether while out on a date, dinner, sightseeing, on holiday etc). His words were: “I fear the day that technology will surpass our human interaction. The world will have a generation of idiots”. Have we reached that point?

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