**Stirrings of life**

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It seems that, despite the rapidly increasing burden of life, people are reconciled with being in chains that restrict their movement and padlocks that stymie their speech. It is said that they have been so used to their captive status that they have stopped dreaming of freedom.

Traditionally they have suffered from a myriad kind of captivity, but the motley crowd has remained unmoved in its resignation to what is accepted as diktat from the beyond. They have been captive of the politicians who exploit their impoverishment to secure their support and build their illicit empires; they have been captive of the bureaucracy who treat them like serfs to be kicked around; they have been captive of the executive for whom they are mere worms crawling about to serve their interests and then exterminated through state power when no longer of benefit; they have been captive of the police who pillage their homes and take away their womenfolk to satiate their carnal desires.

They have been captive of the landlord who keeps their future generations enslaved in lieu of promise of survival and disembowels the privacy of their homes; they have been captive of the patwari who wantonly rescripts the ownership of their land and disinherits them of their holdings; they have been captive of the violent forces which use them as unsuspecting fodder for their hungry cannons.

Worst of all, they have been captive of their own conscience for violating the sanctity of their life and purpose.

With time, they have continued to sink deeper into the pit of enslavement and incremental enfeeblement at the hands of exploitative forces with the prospect of freedom becoming slimmer by the day. It is as if they are resigned to what they take as their fate. Consequently, they have plunged into irretrievable depths of regression, but nothing has stirred their brains frozen under ages of sufferance and pain. This has gradually progressed to becoming a national phenomenon leaving indelible marks on the way we endure our lives and what we desire to make of them.

The moral and intellectual collapse presents a harrowing spectacle. Every asset we are endowed with is up for sale in exchange for measly stakes. The social fabric lies in tatters as compromise rather than a value system becomes the instrument for our progress in life. Self-respect is compromised for worldly benefits and the future sacrificed under the gauntlet of the powerful. There is not a soul that stirs by conscience, and not a mind that works by reason.

People have remained subservient to a system that works by the might of the savage, not the rights of the weak. They are subservient to a judicial dispensation that is beholden to the bastions of power, consequently rendered vulnerable as they continue paying homage to the masters by scripting adjudications to suit the stated needs.

At the core of it, the system works by sharing the pelf among the principal stakeholders. While the bulk of the loot is pocketed by them, a few morsels are tossed in front of a hungry people who take to fighting over their share. Such are their deprivations that they wait anxiously for their next chance to pounce upon the throw-away bounties. This is what life has forced them into becoming through perpetuation of rampant inequalities and inequities.

But they have remained deafeningly quiet. Not a word of protest has been audible lest it may spoil their chance of being potential recipients of the residual morsels. They have grown used to it and suffer no pangs of shame if their supplication assumes the form of a habit that makes them eligible to continue receiving alms for survival.

While such demeanour may have brought them this far, it has not been able to nurture any sustainable hope for the future, more notably for the younger generations which have come of age with the advent of social media and the opportunities of exposure to the outside world to enact a comparison of their lot with that of people elsewhere. With the dawning of this realization, remaining quiet is no longer a natural option. In fact, there are visible stirrings of discontent and a growing urge to take steps for improving their condition.

While there will always be people beating the drums of the status-quo and highlighting the risks of breaking out, a growing number of people are willing to take the chance to alter the substance and shape of their lives.

We are currently witnessing a miniscule manifestation of this phenomenon across the streets of Pakistan with people even resorting to burning the electricity bills which, understandably, are way beyond their capacity to pay. Instead of remaining compliant with promises of relief coming their way, they have taken to protesting their impoverished state. Having been used to dealing with a visibly subservient people, this has sent shockwaves across the ruling echelons, forcing them to contemplate remedial measures. In the meanwhile, rather than dying out, the protests have continued to catch momentum.

It is also clear that the government has few options to address the restive crowd. On the one hand, it is bound by its commitments to the IMF which restrict its operational freedom, and, on the other, it is deeply plagued by its ambition to prolong its caretaker status beyond the constitutionally mandated period of 90 days. A combination of the two ailments makes for a major crisis which the incumbents are faced with.

On top of that is the prospect of Imran Khan coming out of where the orchestrators thought he would be consigned for long. The recent suspension of sentence in the Toshakhana case by the IHC may mark the beginning of a series of possible setbacks for the government. Petitions have been moved calling for the annulment of the Official Secrets Bill and Pakistan Army Bill which the president never signed as is required for these to become laws. Petitions have also been moved against the CCI decision regarding delimitation and ensuring the holding of elections within the constitutionally prescribed period of 90 days. The legal fraternity has commenced a protest movement with the SCBA announcing the first of such gatherings on September 7.

The feeble stirrings of life may be evocative of that latent desire which could never find expression in words – to be free of the chains and padlocks which have kept them hostage of the exploitative forces and their evil manipulators. With a continually deteriorating environment across the economic, political and social domains, the time may have arrived for the restive, even rebellious, people to cast off the suffering of the past. Along the way, holding elections may become the only peaceful option for the traditional claimants to unchallenged authority.

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