**The two tainted narratives**

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We are faced with two narratives today one of the government’s the other that of the opposition but for the average Pakistani, who is not apolitical, but at the same time does not belong to any particular political party, the problem lies in the fact that both seem tainted- one because of credibility and the other performance and distrust.

As we listen to the fiery speeches of the PDM, particularly those made by the charismatic Maryam Nawaz and the impactful Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, we are reminded of other more impassioned speeches and slogans of change. Slogans that spun golden dreams of a different Pakistan, a new Pakistan and therefore we are wary and perhaps a little jaded. I am not sure whether its lack of patience on our part, a wariness as we are told again and again that more time is needed, but the fact is we are tired, weighed down by the baggage of unfulfilled promises.

Accountability and no compromise on accountability has now been heard every day for more than two years but to what end? You blame the last government for the major chunk of corruption in the country for years yet cave, allowing the former Pm to leave for whatever reasons. He then proceeds to make impassioned speeches against you and the establishment. Does that add to your credibility? I think not. The government’s accountability and the opposition’s victimization are unfortunately seen as two sides of the same coin specially when investigations have till date revealed nothing concrete, there has been no decision on any of the cases, the prosecution always seems to fail. The point is, whereas the opposition may not be gaining any credibility, the govt nevertheless, seems to be losing theirs and that is why they seem no different today.

Promises of reform, promises of change that have instead flowed into a pool of rhetoric, a defense of the status quo, a blame game that never seems to end. Glorious promises of a changed Criminal Justice System, a diff Police that have since tumbled have all prompted a despondency and have resulted in a public that is jaded and wary. It is not a question of sincere intentions but of expectations, that seem at this moment in history doomed. The govt could have tried to empower the parliament, empower the local government go down that route, try to make lasting change in their style of governance but instead they have chosen to criticize the opposition, to malign them, to engage in the spitting contest as it were.

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The opposition for their part have decided to learn from their earlier counterparts and resort to the same tactics of trying to amass crowds, to criticize the government and their performance but they seem to have overlooked the jaded crowds who no longer have the capacity to believe whatever tales are being spun for them. They may not be happy with the government’s performance but they are dispirited with it all. Political workers may be dragged to fill the grounds for jalsas, but the public has little to no interest in the games being played before them. The people may like to watch the impassioned speeches of both Maryam and Bilawal but they have not forgotten the baggage they both carry. The former Prime Minister roars from his residence in Hide Park Corner againist the price hike, inflation, the inepititude of the goverment and the irony is not lost on the crowd even for a minute.

However the war of narratives continues day in and day out and their is no refuge.  No refuge from the two narratives in the shape of the vehement often comical exchanges between the opposition and the spokespeople of the government. These undignified, slur casting exchanges highlighting the similarities of the old and the new. The question is no more Is this what we signed up for? but more aptly is this all that this country has to offer? This brand of ‘Trump-like’ politics with no Kamala Harris or Joe Biden in sight? The ‘leaders’ leading their own band of merry men & women whose only job discription is how aptly & crudely they can play the game of pass the buck has us crying in frustration. There might have been an out in the person of either Maryam Nawaz or Bilawal Bhutto Zardari had they not followed the same style of politics but followed they have and oh so diligently.

Another avid participant in this grotesque whirlpool of politics is the Media, not simply showing it the way it is but adding to this ridiculousness by the hour. Showcasing, encouraging the performances of both the government and the opposition in the wrestling ring as it were exhorting them, egging them to perform in a more depraved, offensive manner. That is the ring master’s JD. As one ivy league educated politician told me recently “that is what is required of us” A curious phenomenon that has emerged is that of ‘the presser’ where document waving and revelations are put before the public. Revelations that are mere propaganda and result in nothing in court and then comes the response in the shape of another presser! Where is the truth is no more relevant the audiences have learnt to enjoy the performances that will later be debated on talk shows?

Has the media driven politics of today become all about optics, TV appearances, those useless pressers driven only at mudslinging? Unfortunately, yes. Isn’t it time that the leaders of all political parties actually contemplate if they are fooling anyone. Are we the people so easily fooled and come next general election will the question be about the less bad out of the worst? It will come down to options and if there are only these to choose from we are looking at another five years of the same patterns repeating themselves and that is what the political parties seem to be banking on.

Where is the hope in this convoluted state of affairs? Where are the educated, the truly dignified who refuse to adhere to this ‘requirement’ or is there really no place for these people in this dark world of Pakistani politics? The ‘Change’ nowhere in sight. If this is evolving democracy, let me tell you it is nowhere near maturing. Perhaps if the absolute power enjoyed by party heads could be actually curtailed it would be a step in the right direction. They have presently managed to structure political parties on paper to reflect some ‘democracy’ within the parties but actually there is little to none. The almost comical, unending pandering to the leaders must stop as should the defending of the undependable. In order for politics to emerge from this dark cloud, politicians need to grow a spine, the bowing and scraping needs to stop.

The change as Shakespeare said, ‘The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves.’

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