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**Unfinished business of independence: Part - II**

In the first part of our discussion, we talked about how a modern 20th century democratic state was high-jacked by medievalism 73 years ago and is still struggling to free itself.

This started the conflict between a medieval model of oligarchy and the hopes and aspirations of people nurtured on a daily diet of democracy, rule of law, equality and equal opportunity by 24/7 world media, which lies at the heart of the political instability afflicting Pakistan and its poor standing in several world rankings.

This conflict is prevalent in other areas of national life as well but we will take up three main areas in this space to highlight why the social, cultural, economic and political dividends of independence have still not reached ordinary folks.

The state is a legal entity that embodies the authority of all people in the country, whereas the government represents a part / group of society. While the government is partisan, the state is impartial. In the medieval world, the state did not exist as a separate entity and the law was nothing more than the whims and wishes of the ruler.

This fact was famously expressed by Emperor Louis X1V of France (contemporary of Shahjehan/ Aurangzeb) when he said, “L’etat c’est moi” (I am the state). The Mughal emperors or the rajas and maharajas of the princely states of the Subcontinent also did not subscribe to the higher authority of the state and its laws nor to democratic values of equality and equal opportunity for all. And there was no such thing like the French Revolution in the Subcontinent to convey the message of liberty, equality and fraternity either.

Eroding the difference between the state and government is the first step that removes the bridge which provides access to people – who are not part of the group in the government – to receive public services and enjoy their democratic rights.

It is important to note that the state speaks to its citizens through its laws and none else. Which is why rule of law is so important for a civilized society. It is rule of law that provides protection to the weak against the high and mighty. Without rule of law, ‘might is right’. With rule of law, ‘right is might’.

The proof that the modern democratic state of Pakistan was high-jacked into a medieval model of governance soon after its birth is provided by the Rule of Law Index which captures civilized and democratic values in societies. The index for 2020 puts Pakistan among the bottom 10 countries out of the 128 countries surveyed. Can there be a bigger indictment of the governance of a country founded by the legal genius of Jinnah?

As this index shows, access to justice is no more the human right of the vast majority of people who see their pockets picked and lives eaten away at the altar of this system. Access to justice has been converted into a luxury which only the rich and powerful can afford in the country. But the beneficiaries of such a medieval system are too well-entrenched to allow any reforms.

The second barrier to weak and marginalized people enjoying social and cultural dividends of independence relates to denial of the multi-cultural diversity of Pakistan which was recognized by the Quaid-e-Azam himself. His prescription for forging unity in this diversity was to protect it with rule of law and equal treatment, and create everybody’s stakes in the unity and welfare of the country.

Instead of unity, we tried to enforce uniformity and landed the country in the language riots of East Pakistan soon after independence. The multiculturalism of areas comprising Pakistan is a centuries-old reality which has always promoted mutual respect and harmony. The power of culture to disturb even the best plans is recognized by major business schools around the world also which advise their students to remember that: culture eats strategy for breakfast.

It is difficult to understand the contradictions we create on this issue. While we insist on teaching children foreign languages in schools, we do not encourage them to learn each other’s languages and cultures, to promote better mutual understanding among people of Pakistan and enhance unity amongst them.

Instead, we have been encouraging divisions and subdivisions on sectarian, ethnic, biradari and other lines. The foreign colonials encouraged a ‘divide and rule’ policy because they had no long-term stakes in the colonies and knew they would have to leave one day. But for us to follow divide and rule policies may make it easy in the short term for someone to rule the country; but do we never see beyond our noses to realize where this will lead the country?

Geography is another powerful force and there is no getting away from it. Pakistan occupies a strategic position in South Asia and is a proud inheritor of the great Indus Valley Civilization. We have always had friendly relations with countries in the nearby Gulf and we share many things with them. But Pakistan cannot be transported there and lose its historical identity as has sometimes been the desire of some of the ruling elite.

It never ceases to amaze that, while the rest of the world takes pride in human heritage and the heights of urban planning and development achieved in the Indus Valley Civilization, we don’t want to highlight this rich heritage for our children in their school books. Even today, most cities and towns in Pakistan cannot match the standards of urban planning and design, sanitation, underground drainage and engineering skills of IVC which can still be seen – although our neglect is damaging and eroding the achievement of people who lived on this land five thousand years ago.

Iran celebrates its ancient civilization. So do Iraq and Egypt and other countries. Why do we neglect and not celebrate the high standards of urban civilization attained at Moenjodaro, Harappa, Mehergarh, Kot Digi and other places which are also great tourist attractions for the world?

The mindset of disowning our history and looking for heroes and role models abroad has also seeped into other areas of national life. Our development strategies never want to create wealth through indigenous resources – especially our human resources – and are eager to import readymade solutions lock stock and barrel-along with advisers who have never handled any sector of national economy in their adult lives and are clueless about its potential. A soft reminder: natives have won Nobel Prizes also.

We must be the only country in the world to import even its prime ministers! Suffering a complex showing disdain for all things indigenous should have no place in a country which is sixth largest in the world and sits on the land which boasted of the highest levels of civilization five thousand years ago.

Pakistan needs to cultivate a new image of a country which stands on its geography, builds its vast human resources into the most capable human capital, celebrates its multicultural diversity and takes pride in its history and ancient glorious heritage.

This will remove unsavory labels, raise Pakistan’s standing in the international community, fulfill the hopes and aspirations of the vast majority of its people and lift them from the lowly positions they have been occupying in world rankings.

Concluded

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