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March 6, 2021

**Unfinished business of independence**

Part - I

As the state of Pakistan secured freedom from colonialism after WW2, did the people of Pakistan also secure liberation from the inequities of medievalism and feudalism that had suppressed their potential for centuries, and were further compounded by the legacies of a century of colonialism?

Or, were the sacrifices of the millions in the struggle for independence merely for a change of rulers – from white Christian to brown Muslim – who ruled the new state under the same colonial laws without framing a democratic constitution to liberate people from the legacies of arbitrary, unjust and discriminatory systems of medieval and colonial governance?

In his speech to the first Constituent Assembly of Pakistan on August 11, 1947, Quaid-e-Azam had asked the Assembly members that their first task was to give the new nation a democratic constitution to liberate people from such bondage, enact laws that promote democracy, rule of law, equal treatment and opportunities for all citizens irrespective of caste, creed, colour or other differences amongst them; and demonstrate that the state is impartial in its dealing with all citizens.

But, as events showed, the Quaid’s advice was like water off a duck’s back and they continued with colonial laws to rule over the new state. It was extremely unusual for a country to become free from colonialism and yet its rulers did not want to have their own democratic constitution, and preferred to rule under the same colonial laws for many years.

Malaysia became independent in 1956 and had a democratic constitution of its own next year in 1957. India became independent in 1947 and had its own democratic constitution in 1950. And Indonesia became independent in 1945 and had its democratic constitution in 1949. But it took a quarter of a century and a big tragedy before Pakistan had its own democratic constitution in 1973.

The foundation was thus laid for arbitrary, undemocratic and unconstitutional rule which left deep scars on the body politic and have continued to haunt Pakistan ever since. It also says something about democratic credentials of the rulers who created precedents and provided de-facto legitimacy to unconstitutional rule which was also sanctified by the infamous ‘doctrine of necessity’ back in 1954.

Pakistan’s continuing political instability and various hybrids are rooted in the fault lines created by years of unconstitutional rule after its independence. Subsequent structures built upon this foundation have continued to suffer from the same fault lines. This foundation was laid as the state was captured by the stalwarts of a medieval and feudal culture who turned their back on the guidelines given by the founder of the nation.

This gave a new lease of life to a dying medieval culture of unelected governance which had already been overwhelmed/ defeated by foreign colonials in the Subcontinent. Under this elitist model, governance is considered as the privilege of only a small coterie controlling the corridors of power who play musical chairs amongst themselves in the scramble for power, while people remain mere spectators. In other words, an oligarchy masquerading as democracy.

Over the decades, this model of governance has spread its tentacles all around and played havoc with the lives and livelihoods of the ordinary men and women of Pakistan who have seen the potential of their three generations wiped off at the altar of the musical chairs played by the oligarchs among themselves.

This fact is borne out by the various international indexes which capture conditions of ordinary folks and show that not much has changed in the lives of the vast majority of people of Pakistan.

One after the other, in international rankings capturing social, economic and political progress of people in countries around the world, Pakistan cuts such a poor figure as to be very embarrassing for the sixth largest country of the world which also is a nuclear power and was the brightest star among developing countries up until 1970s – ready for take-off to join the ranks of middle-income countries.

In the World Index on Human Rights, Pakistan stands way down at 120 out of 135 countries surveyed. On the Human Capital index of the World Bank, it stands at 134 in a survey of 150 countries. In the Human Resource Index (HDI) of the UN, which captures education, health and basic standard of living, it stands at 154 in a list of 189 countries. And in the Social Progress Index which collectively captures such important living conditions as nutrition and basic medical care, water & sanitation, shelter, personal safety and inclusiveness etc, Pakistan ranks at 141 position among 163 countries of the world. The country position in per capita GDP and Transparency International rankings is equally depressing.

These surveys which capture the lives and livelihoods of the people, not from a single but from multiple perspectives, show citizens of all Asian countries enjoying higher standing in all rankings than the people of Pakistan. The only Asian countries whose people suffer an even worse fate are the two war ravaged countries of Yemen and Afghanistan.

Bad as these rankings are, what is even more distressing is that none of these shockingly lowly positions have ruffled feathers in the power corridors as no effective remedial measures have been taken to reverse this tide. And the people have been betrayed so many times by so many wolves in sheep’s clothing that they have become indifferent to their tall claims also.

How did our system of governance deteriorate so much?

The answer to this question is available if we look at the similarities and dissimilarities between Singapore and Pakistan. While the founders of both the countries, M A Jinnah and Lee Kuan Yew, were barristers trained in England and believed in the value set of Enlightenment – democracy, rule of law and equality and equal treatment of all citizens of the state – Singapore’s success lay in the fact that Lee’s associates in the People’s Action Party (PAP) also believed in the same value set and worked tirelessly to transform these values into society through laws and policies during Lee’s lifetime and also afterwards.

The problems in Pakistan arose because Jinnah’s leading associates in the Muslim League (ML) did not share his value set of constitutional government promoting democracy, rule of law and equality and equal opportunity for all citizens. They did not see independence as an act of decolonization, and turned the clock back to the medieval ways they were used to once they took control over the new state. This model has been adopted by most rulers who have come to power in Pakistan, leaving the people to fend for themselves. The cumulative results of this model of governance are now reflected in these lowly rankings of the country.

There is no other way for the state of Pakistan than to revert to the model of governance whose roadmap was given by the founder of the nation. That would lift its standing in the international community and pay the debt it owes to the millions who made great sacrifices for independence but have so far been cheated out of its fruits.

To be continued

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