**Pakistan of 2022**

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One of the defining characteristics of this digitally connected society is the extent of choice and opportunity available.

Thirty years ago before the advent of the internet, choices globally were constrained by culture, tradition, and convention. This did not change a whole lot till the advent of social media.

Social media evolved rapidly because man is a social animal.

The English language became the lingua franca of the globe due to British colonialism; the craze for Hollywood movies; and English being the language of science even for industrialized European countries, where English is the medium of instruction for higher education.

Thus the English language social media connected people in ways historically unprecedented. Today, we have the opportunity to pick and choose from a vast array of lifestyle choices related to diverse domains including diet, fashion, sexual behaviour, spiritual practices, consumer habits, cultural activities, fitness regimes, employment, and education.

This choice can either be empowering or it can turn into self-created shackles, as has been the case in Pakistan.

The true self is achieved through the conscious creation of a lifestyle commensurate with individual goals and desires. In a Muslim society like ours, there is an additional variable of moral values derived from faith, which determine if certain choices are in line with our religious construct.

In times of rising poverty, Pakistani social media has taught us that the only way out of financial despair is to start a home-based food business.

The freedom, autonomy, and opportunity offered by the free exchange of information on the internet and social media can lead to the development of an authentic self, resulting in greater mental, spiritual and human well-being.

Lifestyle choices are never made in a social vacuum. They are heavily influenced by peers, parents, community and religious leaders. Cultural expectations and social norms also play a very significant role.

Moreover, social media trends also affect individual decisions.

Pakistanis often make lifestyle choices based on the “fear of missing out” or often attempt to portray a “fun-filled life” on social media.

Pakistanis make lifestyle choices based on the desire for external validation. These trends have brought out the best and worst of us.

I despair of our nation when I see social media maulanas and muftis, who live to gain followers, likes and comments. Their number is increasing by the day and their sermons are politically, and religiously incorrect. Their vain pursuits are appreciated by their followers, and they feast on the attention and reverence of their fawning fans. Visiting the sick, helping someone in need, delivering lectures, everything is showcased to the world, to rise in fame and stature.

Caught in all the pitfalls of social media, they can lead others to the same pit. They are in no position to offer any spiritual guidance for successfully navigating social media in a world that is increasingly gripped by it.

In times of rising poverty, Pakistani social media has taught us that the only way out of financial despair is to start a home-based food business. From a graduate of Canada’s top business school and an experienced professional to women with unemployed husbands, the only ray of hope is selling Biryani, to a food-obsessed nation. Women are joining the workforce for economic empowerment. They watch the lifestyles of celebrities and emulate them. Single girls earn to support a consumer lifestyle. Bank accounts and credit cards are now being heavily marketed to women in particular so that a consumer economy can thrive.

Prime Minister Imran Khan’s emphasis on tourism is another prod in this direction. An ill-disciplined nation that is being geared to become a consumer economy can only spell doom. The recent Murree disaster is an example of that.

The current scenario has led to the economic opportunity being found only in those industries which promote the seven deadly sins of pride, greed, wrath, envy, lust, gluttony and sloth.

Brain drain is a real issue in Pakistan Anyone who can immigrate or move abroad on a work visa, simply leaves. There is no hope of a better future in Pakistan, for those with aspirations greater than selling Biryani, women’s handbags, lawn suits, botox injections or other vain offerings. Pakistan’s fundamental issue is the absolute lack of honesty, ethics and moral values. Until and unless these are inculcated in the people, no progress can be made.

No initiative, scheme or plan can be successful where dishonesty prevails, injustice triumphs and misogyny thrives.

No country has ever achieved progress without honesty, ethics, hard work and determination.

We are a nation neck-deep in debt. Our sovereignty is technically intact but in reality, we are at the mercy of those that fill our begging bowl.

Pakistan is living off charity -from friendly nations such as China- or loans from the World Bank. We are no better than the beggars we see on the streets when we drive past them in our cars.

Our foodie nation, hypnotized by political programs and dramas on television, just does not know where it stands.

Due to unprecedented inflation, Imran Khan’s Naya Pakistan has proven to be a satire of Riyasat-e-Medina. This makes Maryam Nawaz’s rise to power imminent. Nawaz junior will take more loans and submerge us in debt. Quaid-e-Azam sacrificed everything to create a nation that has turned out to be a morally bankrupt beggar nation.

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