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**Decline in the West**

The Western world as we knew it is in a state of flux. The recent attack on Capitol Hill by Trump-incited right-wing extremists in the US is the latest example of it.

There has been a perceptible decline of Western power and rise of China in the last two decades. The Western liberal democratic order is in a mess. Francis Fukuyama’s ‘end of history’ thesis seems like a cruel joke played on the Western world.

No one has analysed the decline of democracy in the West more extensively than Pankaj Mishra. Today, we are going to refer to Mishra’s November 2020 piece ‘Grand Illusions’, for the New York Review of Books, in this article.

Citing Crow Indians’ example, Mishra makes an implicit comparison to the present times in the West – whereby not only has a certain way of living transformed but there is also no serious attempt to find the framework of analysis to understand the world. In the last 20 years, the world has moved to an “entirely new historical period” followed by the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the rise of China, the global financial crisis of 2008, intensification of globalization, and the West’s failed ‘war on terror’.

The mainstream Western intelligentsia, that had earlier continued to argue that there is no viable alternative to Western democracy and capitalism, were at a loss to explain the rising financial dominance of China, prevalence of Hindu supremacist forces in India, empowerment (and even rule in some places) of ultra-right demagogues in the West as a result of an angered electorate over dysfunctional capitalism and democracy. The Western intelligentsia has failed to analyze how racial capitalism and slavery have underwritten the power and wealth of the US and UK over the centuries.

One important lens to apply is to analyse the rise of China and its impact on the Western way of life. Ideas and developments happening geographically away from the Western world are going to have a major impact, which is something that should have been evident even to cold-war thinkers. The rise of China as a global economic powerhouse has an impact on the way capitalism has changed in the West: outsourcing of manufacturing jobs to China, increasing inequality leading to the popularization of White supremacist groups in the West. China is now a “nationalist world power”.

The two generations post World War II in the US and Western Europe did not come across hard political and economic choices as they swiftly moved from more progressive structures to neoliberalism. Fukuyama not only predicted the end of history, he also stated that the class issue had been “resolved” in an “egalitarian” manner in the West; Russia and China need to follow the West, and India being a democracy shared the stakes in the liberal world order.

Only time proved Fukuyama awfully wrong. There was “intellectual narcissism implicit” in such theories of Western mainstream intelligentsia. Therefore, it is important to forsake the whole edifice on that narrow-minded West-centric worldview that has dominated.

During the cold war, liberalism as a proponent of “individual freedom and property rights” became the dominant ideology and those advocating it did not have the foresight to see its contradictions. Modeled on the thinking of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke and carrying on the legacy of the Enlightenment, liberalism was hailed by the Western mainstream. Such thinking was not conscious of its corruption by vested class interests, and erroneously considered it would have a lasting legacy. The developments in the last two decades have exposed its limitations.

The murder of black people at the hands of white policemen, and other racial prejudices, make the young people belonging to minority groups question liberalism, democracy, Enlightenment values etc amidst rising authoritarianism in the West. A fixation on the destructive legacies of Hitler, Mao, and Stalin during the cold-war years, have obscured thinking people in the West to be not conscious of the history of centuries of politics of dispossession and violence by the UK and the US.

Mishra quotes feminist scholar Lorna Finlayson: “As surely as terrible crimes have been committed by socialist states, the history of liberal nations is the history of systematic acquisitive violence: from the genocide of indigenous populations, to chattel slavery, to contemporary ‘regime change’ and ‘humanitarian intervention’”.

One major impact of the self-congratulatory crystallization of liberalism has been ignoring the other worldviews in the world including those of the major anti-colonial ideologues. Thinkers such as Frantz Fanon, Gandhi, Tagore, Jose Marti, Sun Yat-sen amongst others presented a strong critique of Western politico-economic structures and provided their alternative ideas for coexistence but their ideas were not incorporated in the Western mainstream.

It is time to reflect on the writings of Egyptian Samir Amin, Colombian Arturo Escobar, Indian Ashis Nandy, Chinese Wang Hui and others such names from Asia, Latin America and Africa as their experiences are rooted in the decolonization and reworking of those states and societies in the nation-building exercise. Even in Pakistan and India, we need to refute our colonial times’ stereotypes and hail the legacies of our diverse anti-colonial heroes.

A new way of thinking of the world is needed. We need to discard the “grand illusions” of the age of liberalism and narrow-minded thinking of cold-war thinkers in the Western world. There is a need to incorporate an assorted range of thinking from the non-Western world, and critical voices who provide alternatives to the prevalent structures by humanizing politics and economics.

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