**Soul searching in Post-truth Pakistan**

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Right now, Pakistan is going through rapid shifts in politics, parliamentary democracy, and power shows. As an ordinary citizen and single nationality holder, who also loves this land unconditionally, I want to share some of my observations and opinions. I speak from a position of strength and actual experiences as well. I have a demonstrated herStory of surviving unprecedented challenges having their origins in patriarchy, political vendetta, intellectual dishonesty, class, ethnic and gender biases. Still, I get wallowed in deep despondency on noticing that so many illustrious foreign scholarships, information influx and technology savviness in varying combinations are effectively failing to develop and enhance critical thinking and honest analysis among our youth.

A vast majority of a cross-section of our society is neither sad nor shocked to see that our legislatures are represented mostly by the rich and filthy rich, oppressors of rights, overt and covert bigots, and misogynists. The poor and marginalized and well educated from the middle class cannot even dream to contest elections or even get decent paid work that matches their calibre. The uninterrupted power of pedigree is not even considered a challenge towards a social change based on social justice.

Irony dies when one looks without bias at the state and stretch of selective advocacy, activism, feminism, and tolerance.

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A blatant Patriarchal consensus in structures of politics, civil bureaucracy and styles of stakeholders’ management has attained a normative status in actual practice. Women have been barred from casting votes in many parts of our country through agreements among political parties having the right, left and all sorts of ideologies. Those who chant slogans of women’s rights and oppose sharia courts for varied reasons do not mind supporting polygamy of power males or women feminists who willfully opt to become second, third, hidden or declared wives of powerful men many in public positions. Ironically, the supportive argument used to sanction this remains Islam and its self-serving interpretation. Religious teachings of tolerance, respect for diversity etc. are conveniently ignored when and where these suit those cult leaders who feel no hesitation in using the religion card for their gains. Protests for ending Violence against women, girls, children, trans and some minority religious communities are often gone unseen and unheard.

A country that positions 153 out of 156 countries on gender inequality and ranks first globally in having biases against women is made to feel proud for creating political memes, sarcastic tweets etc.

The time has arrived to look at the building blocks of the moral foundations of our politics and promote social goals that are based on our values rather than those embellished by visions created elsewhere. How long we the common people of Pakistan would be conned by the politics without a soul? How long we would stay in a stupor and keep on supporting those front-line political leaders whose near and dear ones have comfortably settled abroad and who enjoy friendly ties with so-called political adversaries through transactional marriages? How long we would choose not to question the Conflict of Interest when thousands of government employees here are dual nationals? Who made laws to protect the privileges of such civil servants and other power elites?

It is time to ask the right questions. Politics should be redefined and equated as a service to the communities. Maybe our influencers in civil society should start spreading awareness about the Swedish model of democracy rated as “full democracy” in The Economist Intelligence Unit’s report for 2020. This country ranks seventh out of 189 countries on the human development index, fifth on the gender inequality index and second on the global innovation index. No treats and superfluities are offered to Swedish politicians who travel without official cars or personal chauffeurs. All parliamentarians including the ministers travel in crowded buses and trains, exactly like their voters. Additionally, the legislators do not enjoy the right to parliamentary immunity. Hence, they can be tried in a court of law like any other ordinary national. I am confident that the mere thought of living the life of an ordinary citizen will stop many from adopting politics as a career and using it as a marketable commodity. In this post-truth Pakistan, serious soul-searching is required and that too urgently.

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