**Social media, demagogues and chaos**

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When Pankaj Mishra wrote his book “Age of anger”, he grasped the spirit of the modern age; anger—probably the only rampant emotion that has taken over the vast majority of mankind in recent times. According to Mishra, “Secularism, development, modernity and progress have long been viewed by the powerful few as benign ideals for the many. Today, however, botched experiments in nation-building, democracy, industrialisation, and urbanisation visibly scar much of the world. As once happened in Europe, the wider embrace of revolutionary politics, mass movements, technology, the pursuit of wealth, and individualism has cast billions adrift in a literally demoralised world.
The world today is divided on political, social and religious lines. It is interesting to note that social media has been used by demagogues, populists and mob leaders; the only place where they can get undivided attention and validation from the masses. From Trump to Modi the obsession with social media for populist leaders is uncanny. Hence, social media in these times is just another tool of, not bringing about awareness to the things that need to be done, rather a tool that is used by the elite and social media users to bring unprecedented social and political changes through fuming outbursts of anger and hatred. Social media has become a toy of the elite capitalists to give a fake sense of ‘vent out’ to the angry masses without substantial and workable solutions.
The case of India and the far right in Europe is an example of how extremist groups have used the social media domain for squeezing the space for sanity and reasonable dialogue. India has been at the eye of the Hindutva extremist storm that has grasped India like a python. Extremist leaders have used brawls at TV, as well as social media, to maximise their appeal to the masses. As Arundhati Roy puts it, “Lynched by TV is the new normal in India”. Unfortunately, it has worked. This noise on social media has suppressed the sane voices in India as well as the region. Pakistan’s case has not been very different. The ongoing political chaos owes much to the media and social media debate that is taking place in the country. Unlike mainstream, social media is unregulated, noisy and chaotic. In the absence of any regulatory body that can keep a check on social media, it has gone off track. There is an absolute lack of decent debate. It has become a place for Islamophobic material, libel, harassment and unabashed hatred against each other.
Another issue with social media, and its working, is the lack of transparency in how it encroaches on the privacy of common citizens. Privacy of personal information is the key to safety where social media completely lacks credibility. It is a well-known fact that this information is misused by the leading advertising firms around the globe. Majority of the social media organisations do not have offices in Pakistan which allows them to be indifferent to the complaints of the citizens and governments regarding their culture sensitivities, religion and other social dynamics. The complaint system is weak to the extent that it puts a question mark on the real motives of social media organisations like Twitter. In some cases, complaints of serious nature take weeks and months to be processed and by that time the damage has been done. Over the years the world has seen a consistent decline in cultural values of respect, dignity, and privacy. Social media, especially in Pakistan, has just taken the whole thing to a new low. On one side where it has its few positive points, it has scored more negative points in the absence of a well-defined legal framework and regulations. Each passing day without a proper framework the debate is pushing Pakistan into a blind alley. This situation is fanning frustration among the educated lot that expects a decent and useful debate to produce tangible and positive results. It is time that social media, across the spectrum, must be regulated for the greater good of society and its people. The state of Pakistan must regulate and put a check on the threatening environment that the social media has produced. It has threatened the lives of journalists, scholars, professors, politicians and common citizens. In the garb of free speech people’s lives and dignity are at stake.