**Youth and Political Turmoil**

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“Only a country that feels invulnerable can afford political turmoil as entertainment”-Lionel Shriver (American journalist)

Pakistan has recently witnessed another political debacle, following the no-confidence motion against the then prime minister Imran Khan on April 9, 2022, who, after staying in power for about three-and-half years, had to step down to make way for a new government, being headed by Shehbaz Sharif. History keeps on repeating itself, preventing every consecutive prime minister from completing the assigned five years tenure, jolting the political ship that desperately tries to remain aloft amid turbulent waves of disorder and chaos. Consequently, democracy, in the true sense of the word, has failed to establish itself in this Land of Pure. Honestly speaking, this is injustice inflicted on the public, in general, and the youth, in particular.

In August 2018, in the article “Our youth are uncut diamonds,” the following observation was made: “The biggest disservice any government or leader can do to his people is conveniently neglect the youth because the destruction of one generation in terms of development of self is a sure shot recipe of disaster for that country.”

Unfortunately, we have continued to create worsening situations-especially on the political front-for our youth, instead of harnessing this vital asset for the betterment of this country. Our political leaders have consistently utilised the youth’s extraordinary energy for gratifying their own ambitions without paying any heed to its constructive development. Rapid changes in government, erratic displacement of prime ministers, military coups, constant furore by opposition parties, massive shut-downs because of dreadful street protests on the flimsiest of grounds, sit-ins (dharnas) by engaging young ones, etc. lead to political vacuums, which, in turn, create uncertainty; preventing proper growth of young people, leaving them in distress and anxiety.

For the most part, people desire peace and order in society and we, as a nation, are no different. We have been struggling over the last many years to bring about political stability, but each time, we think we have achieved a milestone, the entire house of cards comes tumbling down exposing the frivolity of our efforts. These upheavals have destroyed tranquillity vital for promoting a progressive society and healthy nation leaving in its wake nothing but intolerance, regression and anger. The future seems bleak with no hope for respite and prosperity. While we enviously view countries that have achieved remarkable progress, we are frustrated at the snail’s pace of our own development. The youth is even more disgusted at fast depleting job opportunities despite spending a fortune on education and because of the population explosion, increasing the number of aspirants.

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These factors are frustrating for the youth. While the non-serious are more prone to political activism with plentiful time for participating in congregations supporting their favourite candidates, the non-partisans worry about what the future holds for them. With gloomy prospects in their own homeland, they look towards securer countries to provide them refuge from all the hullaballoo created by politicians together with other governmental institutions. Over the last thirty years, there has been a massive brain drain wherein well-to-do and even not so well-to-do young adults have sought permanent residences in different countries. Meanwhile, the few nationalists and die-hard Pakistanis left behind are the ones still struggling to realise their dream of seeing a thriving country and a flourishing nation befitting the aspirations of the twenty-first century.

The psychological impacts of political disruption are far-reaching as explained by experts. While lives are at threat in frequent physical confrontations by followers of opposing parties, social media activism has its own disastrous effects adversely hitting mental health. Noshene E. Ranjbar MD, a clinical associate professor says: “Our nervous system and brain is much more responsive to finding points of connection and similarity and deeper human understanding and connection. On the other extreme, our limbic system, which is the fight or flight or freeze, tends to really get activated the moment we don’t feel safe and we feel attacked and we feel like we’re in a place where we’re even seeing eye-to-eye with another person.”

On social media, the circulating disheartening information becomes a source of tension with persons of opposing views as has been witnessed during these politically tumultuous days. Self and other priorities are neglected to engage in verbal battles and news is callously disseminated without bothering to verify details resulting in even severer clashes. This kind of negative association with think-alike groups causes disharmony among the population and other than creating wide rifts does nothing more than give vent to frustrated people who perceive these activities as worth the struggle, provided their preferred candidates emerge successfully. In this rumpus, it is the mental health of mainly the youth that is prone to getting worse over time. The absence of sufficient and easily available medical facilities in our country can aggravate these ailments more so when seeking such help is considered shameful.

One can say with confidence that it is unjust for the younger generation to be born in a country in which their hope for eking out a good life for themselves and their families is nothing more than wishful thinking. From the day of birth right up to the grave, the wretched are forced to scramble for their basic entitlements like clean, hygienic living, free drinkable water, good education, basic medical facilities, justice, uninterrupted supply of electricity and of course these days, easy access to the internet. Things that people of many countries take for granted are yet not within the reach of majority of Pakistanis and what exacerbates the situation is the political turmoil that never seems to ebb.

There is a severe lack of far-sightedness on the part of politicians who take short-term decisions only to gain popularity and refrain from doing something that can have lasting benefits, for the nation. Money is poured in those projects that can materialise with immediate effect and that can carry the names of the incumbent leaders while no attention is paid to such development that may be completed long after they are no more in power but would be good for many generations to come. This type of thinking has left Pakistan punctured and the youth disillusioned while beneficiaries of political turmoil extract wealth and go on to roost in foreign countries. One needs to heed the advice of Binnu Dhillon which goes as: “I’d advise the youth to not get influenced or forced by their elders. They should have own political views and choices and the courage to pick the right leader.”

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