



FRUSTRATION AND HOPELESSNESS IN THE YOUTH

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“This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity and there is a direct connection between this feeling and the longing for death.” – Albert Camus

Albert Camus artistically highlighted the consequences of separating two things that are meant to be together; however, Pakistan’s stakeholders vehemently promote its division. For instance, youth and policymaking go hand in hand, but in this country, the young population is neglected as if there were no youth bulge, and policy is devised without caring much about this segment of the country. This division fuels frustration among the young people of this country. There are three obvious reasons for this frustration i.e. political exclusion, unequal economic opportunities, and intellectual decadence. These outcomes have negative impacts that are visible in the form of brain drain, extremist tilt, and a sense of hopelessness. Indeed, time waits for none, but still, there is time to mend ways and engage youth in socio-economic-political affairs for the sake of Pakistan’s prosperity.

Before discussing the reasons for the youth’s frustration, it would be better to reminisce about the Pakistan Movement and the role of youth. Pakistan Studies subject is full of events, developments, and breakthroughs that

were achieved with the blood and sweat of youth. Indeed, it was the students of Aligarh Muslim University that were known as the arsenal of Muslim leadership: the same ones who organised campaigns and gathered people to exert pressure on the urgency of pushing for a new country. Fast forward to current times, youth is nowhere to be seen: particularly leadership roles. The youth is trapped between the so-called glorious past of the youth mobilisation and the heinous present of the youth crackdown.

There are plenty of reasons for youth’s frustration; chief among them being political exclusion. It is said that student unions function as launching pads for the future generation of a state’s leadership. Unfortunately, Pakistan’s ruling elite have always feared them – particularly since 1980s, when a comprehensive crackdown was launched against them. Due to this exclusion from the political domain, the young generation sees no purpose in engaging in national affairs. It is thus no wonder young folks are hardly seen in political parties – which seem to be dominated by either dynastic families or establishmentarian puppets. If students were empowered through unions, incidents like the one at Islamia University Bahawalpur recently would never have occurred because the administration would not have the liberty to

exploit innocent girls' lives so brazenly. Hence, political exclusion is one of the reasons behind the youth's helplessness.

Similarly, unequal economic opportunities is another factor that triggers widespread displeasure among the young citizens of this country. Economic success is the single most powerful factor that can change a nation's destiny. However, in Pakistan, the state authorities who should have brought out revolution in the start-up culture end-up promoting existing elites. Due to this, there are more papa-made businessmen than self-made ones. Moreover, loans, subsidies, and tax cuts are sucked by opportunistic industries in oligopolistic markets and young entrepreneurship is nowhere to be seen.

Intellectual decadence is another major point of frustration for the youth. In both scientific and technological knowledge, Pakistan lags far behind other countries in the region. The curriculum and pedagogical approaches are devised in a way that prohibits students from thinking out of the box and questioning the essence of things that surround them. Michel Foucault said, "Knowledge is power" but in this country, it is rephrased, as 'power is power' – or might is right. Generating clear, well thought out questions is important because it is the first step towards getting the right answers. Jacob Bronowski, a Polish-British mathematician, put it aptly: "That is the essence of science: ask an impertinent question, and you are on the way to a pertinent answer." To sum up, intellectual decadence is a slow poison that will never allow the country's talented minds to rise.

The consequences of the young generation's helplessness are severe and brain drain is one of them. To understand this phenomenon, do a personal survey and ask any about-to-graduate citizen of Pakistan if he/she wants to remain in this country or aspires to go abroad where he/she will have to sustain low-paying and high intensity jobs in the short to medium term, juggling them with other responsibilities (such as studies) in many cases. The answer to this question is evident from the workers registered for employment abroad in 2022 and the number is 829,000 citizens. This is the result of frustration that is suffocating the future of Pakistan.

As not everyone can go abroad at once, the remaining frustrated youth fall prey to extremist forces. Populist leaders, religious scholars, and exploitative entities target vulnerable young individuals to gain traction for their hateful and exclusionary ideologies. This same breed will occupy seats in civil-military bureaucracy, business community, and civil society or and the machinery of the state in general. Pakistan was and continues to be in a web of extremist threats precisely because they seem to

be convenient tools to push entrenched interests. Joining extremist organisations is one of the butterfly effects of the helplessness of youth in Pakistan.

The young populace that is neither able to escape the country nor join hands with extremist groups seeks comfort in the sense of hopelessness. The reality of being entirely powerless confronts every individual in this nuclear-powered state. Even in the 21st century, the survival of the fittest is practiced. According to Islamic teachings, hopelessness is a major sin that is capable of excluding the follower out of religion. Despite this, senselessness and hopelessness have prevailed and nobody cares because everyone is busy doing his or her business. State authorities are busy in their power games and amidst this; the future machinery of the nation is being compromised. Therefore, a sense of hopelessness has prevailed among the young Pakistanis.

There is no denying the fact that youth is facing multifarious problems now; nevertheless, the state can alleviate the problems by incorporating youth in the aforementioned domains that foster this hopelessness. If not the state, then who is responsible for making amends to the generational wrongs committed against the future of Pakistan? We do still claim democratic status after all. As far as politics is concerned, dynastic politics will not be sufficient to run key institutions of the state and the injection of youth through unions or any other platform should be encouraged. Moreover, equal economic opportunities will enhance economic activity in the country. Finally, intellectual development can be a pivotal force in bringing about a technological revolution to Pakistan. Hence, youth must be facilitated in mainstream policy-making.

To conclude, the state authorities have left the young population in the lurch. The evidence of this can be observed from the non-existent participation in politics, unequal distribution of incentives in the field of economics, and an intellectual deficit in meeting the needs of the present. As discussed, the consequences of these factors are clear in the shape of brain drain, extremism, and hopelessness. These evils can be redressed with the help of incorporating new blood in the socioeconomic fabric of society. Without doing so, the country will be home to continuous crises likely to threaten its very existence.

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