

Rise, ye children

Tribune

I elaborate on each below, directly addressing young folks in particular

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Half of Pakistan's population of 230 million is below the age of 23. As 75 years of 'independence' have shown, ruling elites in Pakistan have little to no incentive to pursue change. The extractive colonial style system serves them incredibly well and they are more than happy to play musical chairs with one another for the power corridors to no end. It is up to the youth of Pakistan to rise to the occasion and demand a radical departure from the status quo. For this, three primary tools will serve as most valuable: activism, education and self-mastery. I elaborate on each below, directly addressing young folks in particular.

Politics. Malcolm X once said, "Any time you beg another man to set you free, you will never be free. Freedom is something that you have to do for yourselves." In a study by the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics, only 3 per cent of the approximately 20,000 people surveyed claimed to be part of a club or voluntary association. Progress only happens when citizenries demand it. If the establishment perceives no consequences for failing to perform, it will naturally continue with business as usual. Participate in politics: whether that is by raising a voice on social media, writing a blogpost, organising events on campus, offering support to social movements, campaigning for parties, donating to causes you believe in, or simply talking to others about their grievances. The prevalent idea within policy circles is that technical expertise will lead us out of this quagmire: a delusion. Prosperity is just as much about continual negotiations on power relations between the

various stakeholders in society. The youth must adopt a proactive role in acting as a formidable pressure group to push progressive ideas.

Knowledge. In a country that not only devalues education but sees it with suspicion, it is up to you to seek it out. Books will help you see that the world is an intricate system of moving parts — helping you locate yourself and your place in the larger scheme. This will enable you to generate concrete strategies for how to move forward in your life. Only focusing on what you desire, regardless of how noble it may be, is naïve: being able to navigate the terrain in front of you is how you will manifest it — and that is where being educated will make all the difference. When you read, ensure exposure to a broad range of viewpoints. Philosopher Friedrich Hegel’s theory of dialectics is important here: the movement of history is fuelled by the interaction of theses and antitheses — which eventually amalgam to form syntheses. The inverse of ‘strawmanning’ is ‘steelmanning’, whereby a set of ideas are developed to their full strength before one allows themselves to stage a critique — allowing for full understanding. In the words of John Stuart Mill, “He who knows only his own side of the case knows little of that.”

Discipline. Do what needs doing. Not what others expect of you — although that is part of it — but what your ideal self would be nourished by. The problem, of course, is that the conscience never shouts: only whispers. It’s always in the fleeting ‘aha’, ‘hmm’, and ‘wow’ moments that it presents itself. Pay attention to those and use them as signposts. If that is too difficult, consider what you may be avoiding. One of my favourite phrases, ‘In sterquiliniis invenitur’ (Latin) has proven useful. It roughly translates to, ‘In filth, and faeces, it shall be found.’ In other words, what you most need will be found in the places you least want to look. They say true Hell is when the person you are meets the person you could have been. Adversity can be a wonderful ally: stay true to the promises you make yourself and play the long game.

Expecting anything fruitful from Pakistan’s toxic gerontocracy is futile. Rise, ye children — and take back what is rightfully yours.

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