

Social change in pakistan



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Pakistan enters the second decade of the 21st Century as a majority middle class society, indicating an increasing social and economic mobility[1]and therefore demand for new services and for global relationships. This process of social change from Feudal to Civil society is fraught with complications creating institutional vacuum that distorts the social change process and makes the change slow and reducing society's competitive advantage vis-à-vis other societies. One of the major impact is that about 60% of the middle class comprises of low income households who earn between Rs. 5000 (US\$60) and Rs. 25000 (US\$300). The low income households are highly vulnerable to slipping below the poverty line, have little or no citizenship rights and political voice and depend on informal sector for housing, employment, finance, transportation and social services. The second impact is the massive environmental degradation and pollution due to unregulated production and exploitation of natural resources. Now with more than 70% of the population below 30 years of ages, and the ever increasing demand for services and low level of energy production and infrastructure development, Pakistani society faces a crisis of competitiveness to benefit from the social change process.

Also Pakistan has been carved out of the Indian sub continent where the Central Asian Tribal society and the Indian Caste based society meet. On right bank of the Indus River, especially in the North Western Frontier Province (NWFP) and the upper reaches of Balochistan, bordering with Afghanistan, the society has a strong tribal nature. Of the 9% of Pakistan's 168. 8 million persons living on the right bank, 23% are middle class and the urban proportion is 20%. On the left bank of the Indus River where the caste

societal structure is crumbling, 64% of the population is middle class and the urban proportion is near to 40%. The violence accompanying the societal change evident in 16th century Britain, and in 18th and 19th century Europe and America that ushered in a constitutional government and abolished slavery and fiefdoms, is now taking place on the right bank of Indus River. One reason for the delayed change is the existence of the tribal institutions that is strongly conservative in nature, values survival, and has the capacity to maintain subsistence economy based on natural resources and wars to capture neighboring resources. The closing in of the borders is forcing the tribal society to change, but there is a strong resistance given the foreign aid it receives.

The Caste based society; mainly feudal in nature has undergone considerable change since British colonization of the Indian subcontinent triggered the change from Feudal to Civil society in the Mid-Nineteenth century. The British were able to trigger the change because the Civil society structure they brought was more advanced[2]than the Feudal, and it was in an advanced stage of development in Britain[3]. The Colonization process started a process of capture of resources (restraining the locals from its use), its massive conversion into capital, and its transfer to Britain for its Industrial development. This process was facilitated by technological innovation and marginalized the local communities directly dependent on them. To help the British in this process they created a cadre of people i. e. educated them, gave them political and administrative powers and enabled them to become economic agents. ‘ The English Speaking’ elite that emerged through a century of British rule continue to play key role in the transfer of resources

from Pakistan to global market at the cost of local population. These elite hold key position in Government, academia, businesses and military. They create nexus to marginalize other sections of the society from developing and partner with external forces to exploit the country's human, financial and natural resources. They influence government policies and prevent low income groups from legitimizing their social, economic and political assets. And therefore, restricts the society from developing new services and institutions and keeps the low income dependent on mafia for services. This process like virus corrupts all new reforms and innovations and kills them before they can institutionalize. To maintain the status quo, they capture benefits from development projects and malign citizen organizations from bringing about social change.

After the Aryans invaded the subcontinent and pushed the Dravidian society to retreat, they established the Caste structure that gave the highest position to the priest class, secondary positions to warriors and traders, and relegated the non-Aryan to a position of slavery and outcasts. This society grew and developed and consolidated the feudal mindset. Muslim invasion of the subcontinent created a historical schism in the existing society and divided it into two nations. Being invaders and rulers, the Muslims could not be relegated to the slave status and at the same time the Muslims coming from a tribal society could not enforce a new structure on the existing more advanced social structure. During the Moghul rule, attempts were made to bring the nations together but to no avail. As the British opened doors to social and economic mobility, the secondary castes were quick in entering the elite circle, while the Muslims because of their elite nature alienated

themselves from the development process and even opposed the process. Within the Muslims developed orthodoxy and conservative forces entrenched themselves as leaders. During the British rule, the caste system began to weaken but the Hindu-Muslim schism widened. On the eve of partition, Bengal and Punjab were divided and mass migration took place. The violence that took place during Partition and the forceful capture of Muslim states and part of Kashmir further heightened the Hindu-Muslim divide. Governance in Pakistan's therefore developed as a reaction to Indian hostility and gave legitimacy and support to Conservative rule in Pakistan.

In Pakistan, conservative forces created a nexus between Pakistan's Muslim identity and security issue to oppose liberalizing civil society. With the setting in of the Afghan War, Pakistani conservatives received massive support that went into strengthening conservative elements and strengthening sectarian differences. The conservative elements weakened the governance structure through creation of sectarian politics, support to militancy and suppressing all other forms of political and cultural forums. They marked development as threat to Muslim identity and supported violent means to distort development, especially education, population planning and political participation. The conservatives saw the educated and emancipated young women aggressively seeking social and economic freedom and creating new aspirations, connections and symbols of expressions as a major threat, and have launched a movement to contain and regulate the emerging 'new woman'. The backlash has been in the name of religion and to maintain family honor and social values. The conservatives have put up all sort of hurdles to block women's mobility,

education, employment, freedom of expression (especially public appearance) and decision making. The reactions range from domestic tensions to honor killings and to preventing new women from voting and participating in political activities. Conservative forces at all levels have tried to keep the women domesticated and out of public realm to the extent of engaging in terrorism and creating human insecurity. The new women, not to be contained are sacrificing her life, honor and property to realize the new found dreams and freedom. Her greatest assistance comes from Civil societies in more advanced stage of development, and presently with more than 70% of the population below 30 years of age in Pakistan, she is poised to overcome the conservative forces with the help of foreign institutions to establish Civil society in Pakistan.

In Punjab, after Independence, the immigrant Muslims settled in cities and small towns and today forms the backbone of the middle class. Even though large number of migrants was from rural areas or carried a Feudal mindset, but the migration changed them and they were forced to accept a middle class lifestyle. The Punjabis therefore participated in the market based process and took an edge given the historical discrimination facing other communities. The lower castes because of the historical discriminations began entry as the agricultural revolution – mechanization, financing of agricultural inputs, land reforms, road and communication development, etc forced the feudal to release stranglehold. Coupled with Industrial production and development of urban services, agricultural revolution also set into motion rural to urban migration and the centralization of political power in cities.

The middle class started developing in cities, but with Feudal order sustaining the values and mindset, the new middle class remained Feudal. The change process manifested itself in the political agenda of the seventies and in the Pakistani constitution of 1973 that recognized the people as citizens with rights and stimulated the growth of working class. It tried to decimate the edge enjoyed by the elite through nationalization and encouraging the peasants to participate in the emerging construction, transportation and communication industries. Subsequently, the low income group or working class earning a monthly household income below Rs. 25,000 (US\$300) and above the national poverty line of Rs. 5000 (US\$60) emerged as force. In addition to new migration to urban areas, the low income group also comprises of a middle class in rural areas. This group even today however has little or no access to formal sector services and citizenship rights. Consequently, they acquire these services – housing, finance, transport, employment, etc. through informal sector and collaborate with mafia and interest groups to access citizenship rights and seek protection from law enforcing agencies. The low income households over time has improved its income and status with the help of informal sector and in the process strengthened the mafia and created new interest groups – transporters association, informal money lenders, land mafia and land grabbers, etc. The low income households are estimated to be more than 60% in Karachi, Pakistan's biggest city and in higher proportions in other urban and rural settlements. These households are most vulnerable to edging below the poverty line because of dependence on a single earner who is susceptible to health risks, human rights violations and accidents.

Conclusions

Summarily, the social change in Pakistan from a tribal and caste based society to Civil society is reflected in the rise of the low income groups. And this most obvious in the left bank of River Indus where rural and urban middle class are in majority. The new women are leading the social change process at a very high cost. The process however is not complete and fraught with violence. In the process of change, though middle class are in majority and increasing in number but their aspirations and demands are not finding a political expression. Three complications in the social change process have created an institutional vacuum[4]:

As a result of the complications in the social change process, development remains small and scattered. Big development projects marginalize the target groups, lead to elite capture of development benefits and destruction of public goods and formation of duplicate institutions. Small pilots develop into models but fail to scale up. Institutional vacuum maintains the demand for social mobilization, awareness raising and training, making development inefficient and unsustainable.