

## **WHITHER, LAND OF THE LEAL**

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In the Nation's Issue of 10.1.1994, a report which ran into the eyes was that millions of rupees have been 'bungled' by two Officers of Agricultural Development Bank of Pakistan. Another such report was that "angered Taj Company Depositors stoned the Management of the Company when they started disbursement of the cheques to the Affectees after deduction of profits".

2. According to another story, certain officials of the Government of Sindh including Mr. Imtiaz Sheikh Secretary of the former Chief Minister are alleged to have embezzled millions of rupees from Government funds. It further goes to say that "the Investigation Teams have so far unearthed a number of immovable properties worth several billions of rupees, that the ex-Secretary had allegedly bought with the Government funds". Detailed description of the properties given in the papers can safely be discarded as irrelevant.

3. A special report of the same issue is also worth its while. It says that "the pollution, proliferation and urbanization in the country caused (during the year 1993) increase in all the forms of pollution—air, water, noise, buildings etc. etc; a direct result of increasing number of motor-vehicles (mostly smoke emitting), industrial units, (hardly equipped with instruments controlling pollution) with discharge of more and more effluent and waste water" and that "all this has jolted the environment balance in Pakistan". For another case in point, we may make a mention of money matters column of the Issue of 16.8.1993, which dealt with the subject of corruption's share of G.D.P. It dealt with the quantum of black economy worked out on the basis of 1992-93's GDP.

4. There is, however, nothing unusual about them and many such harrowing reports have already seen the light, either in the National Press or otherwise in different forms. Much though in frequency, they still retain the extent and gravity of their far reaching effects on our social environment. Firstly, because they are subject-wise important in their own right, as they deal with very sensitive aspects of our public life. Their sinistrality makes us aware of what is precipitating us down the hill, head over heels. Secondly for the reason that they provide us with a context for considerations, highly sensitive in nature and material in terms of ramifications.

5. As we see, these reports are replete with grave allegations of corruption, knavery, favoritism, criminal misappropriation, perdition and lawlessness, causing total deterioration in all spheres of public life. Given the fact that rampant corruption can easily be noticed even by the application of just a naked eye, in its palpable manifestation in the shape of environment pollution with shabby and poor public services, the truth remains that they are mere allegations and that they will continue to remain the same in character so long as they are not established and the persons involved are brought to book. Nothing can be more outrageous against accepted norms of criminal jurisprudence than a mere presumption of guilt and we always do require evidence for a punitive action. Therefore, it is primarily in the public interest as also in that of the persons involved that these allegations must be put to the test of trial.

6. Of real concern is the fact that we seldom hear about the fate of these matters. We never know whether the allegations were duly proved resulting in retribution. Nor, for that matter, it ever comes to our notice that the accused was exonerated of the charge for want of evidence and that the author of baseless allegations was taken to task. No such matter is carried to its end, at least in so far as the print media are concerned. This, I should say, is absolutely necessary, for the people must learn from the same source as to what happened to the case, to be able to form an opinion on such vital issues of national bearing, which is essential for reformation and development of the body politic.

7. We are not short of cases where, regardless of such allegations, the persons involved continue to enjoy the same social status. They hardly lose in popularity and still remain in the centre of things and occupation of positions of prominence in public functions. Another aspect of the matter also deserves a side light. We do not have to go any distance in search of instances, where we now say the most sordid things about a person and then just the next moment we would greet him with both hands and lead him to the stage to be accommodated in a place of distinction. This is for the obvious reason that there is no retributive

justice. Neither the guilty nor the malinger is taken to the task. Unfortunately we do not have a theory of reward and punishment.

8. The results of this state of affairs are very distressing. A special class of hypocrites, sycophants and parasites has come to stay and is growing by leaps and bounds. What they are, with what mission to accomplish and the extent of damage being done by them to the national character are left to your imagination. Then, with the passage of each day, our minds are becoming rank and these reports of corrupt practices and malfeasances, are loosing the alarm they used to raise in the past. The element of shock stirred by such stories is fast vanishing and we have now started taking them as matters of course.

9. We are falling into a vicious vortex. It is no longer possible to fix the responsibility of this massive deterioration on any one person. If you accuse the fruit-seller of charging much more than the previous year, his explanation would lie in telling you that he has been forced to do so because the same is being done by the mutton-seller. On approach you will find the latter ready with an excuse that he had to do it for the Milkman had raised the price of milk. Considering that here at last was the real culprit, you would gleefully turn towards the Milk-Vendor with a noose in hand for his neck. He in turn will promptly get out of it with impunity by telling you that all others too had raised the prices of their custom and he had no alternative but to follow suit. All of them will go with the complacency, and rightly so, that nothing is wrong so long as there is an explanation.

10. Further, there is almost nothing about which you might say that it is not the done thing in our society. Your performance is judged in juxtaposition with what is done by others of the same class who are always prepared to go to any extent. In their dictionary there is no such word as impossible, immoral, bad or beyond competence. The result is that those who expect you to do something for them, go with the feeling that something due was intentionally denied or withheld. Rare would be the realization that they have been misled to this belief by those who are without scruples.

11. The worst to come about is that the word offence is undergoing a conceptual change. Our malady, now with the passage of time, is not corruption, inefficiency and want of integrity, but the fact that these things have ceased to be offensive and are no longer regarded as disqualifications. We are hardly averse to those with such base mental propensities and aptitude. Such is the extent of decline that our social environment is not any longer viable for honest people; and why one should try to be so when nothing distinctive is left about it. There is no contrition, no ruth and, for that matter, there is no compunction. If the present shape of things is allowed to have its course, nothing is likely to remain offensive.

12. As if its assault was not enough on other spheres of life, corruption has not spared even the field of culture. We are now-a-days in the midst of marriage fever. It seems as if the whole nation has nothing else to do for its occupation. Hardly a day passes without extravagant marriages festivities. There are functions of 'dholaks' ubtans, tail mehndis, mayuns, nikah and walima; to say nothing of the main function. Some of us indulge in this wasteful display of opulence, in a bid to acquire counterfeit respectability. Others do it only to avoid an adverse criticism. The other day I told a friend that I was invited to a function to taste the food, the kind of which was to be served on different warm up functions before the main ceremony. He in turn told me that his wife was invited by that of a neighbour to a "scissors application ceremony" which was to serve as a prelude for preparation of the bride's paraphernalia.

13. Then there are marriage parties. Hours are spent in waiting for their arrival, what with the competition in inviting VIP guests. The time before the arrival of the marriage parties is of course not allowed to go waste. We discuss the merits and demerits of the meals served and arrangements made on different functions of the previous marriage ceremonies. The hosts are heartily condemned for poor arrangements and meals. All we are concerned with is the quality of food and its abundance. The hosts and the marriage ceremony be damned.

14. God! What is happening to us. Where are we going? If at all, when is the turning point to come. Influenced by the fact that all efforts for ultimate disintegration are ascribed to RAW agents, it seems to me as if an whole army of them has been let loose by our enemies to distort and smear the face of our culture and make it as ugly as possible. Is there anybody in this country to go on the pulpit and say no more of this nonsense. The least which can be proposed is the formation of a society, in the fashion of societies for prevention of cruelty to animals, to wage a holy war against these ribald, stupid and extravagant practices. If

you come to think of it, this would amount only to hitting Dracula with sunshine. What we require in addition is a drastic legislation providing for exemplary punishments for eradication of these evil practices; resulting in colossal loss of time and resources. Whatever be the method, they must be destroyed, leaf, branch, root and seed, which requires an intrepid approach and application by those at the helm.

15. The purpose of what is being said is certainly not only to play the spook, but to point out certain realities so that, before the chips are down, we may summon whatever Islamic has been left in us, to rise to the challenge of these maladies, so sordid and lethal in character. The need of the hour is to go the whole hog for extermination of these evil practices instead of making the pathetic best of things.

16. As things are, this is not the promised land which was won by so many sacrifices to be able to conduct our lives in accordance with the injunctions of Islam. Freedom is no doubt there but this is certainly not the one we had in our dreams. I do not bewail that the desired land has not been found. My anguish is for the fact that sense of loss is gone. The tragedy of our existence is that we appear to have lost the way.