Causes of protests, visible & invisible (Pakistan Observer)

Shams uz Zaman, Mr.
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The level of violence displayed in recent protests has left many dumbfounded. Despite that the video was several months old and became public few weeks ago, the level of rage and violence was simply beyond comprehension for most in and outside Pakistan. The pattern of this violence however is not new as people had witnessed such violence after the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, Danish cartoons and against long spells of load shedding. The pattern indicates that the rage was not just about the video but other invisible factors also fueled the anger as later protests remained mostly peaceful.

In a classical Islamic state protesting is not permissible which can put life and property of people at risk and can be hijacked by anti-state elements as witnessed in Pakistan and even during London riots. Against any grievances, in an Islamic state, people have the right to directly question the caliph or the governor and if not satisfied, have the right to go knock at court’s door. Numerous examples from Islamic history can be cited in this regard. Likewise, in case of a wilful blasphemous incident outside state boundary, it becomes incumbent upon the state/government to ask from host state to take appropriate action against the blasphemer or else it would be treated as a hostile act. Unfortunately, this isn’t the case in Pakistan where government is neither interested to address the grievances of the people nor is ready to regard the collective wisdom of elected representatives.

Rather the government has willfully and by ascendancy deprived people of their basic rights by increasing cost of living to ensure continuity of their luxurious lifestyles. Masses are also humiliated and denied access to various public and government offices in the name of security, consequently creating three distinct classes in Pakistan and polarizing the state never witnessed since 1947. This polarization of society into ruling elite, the working middle class and deprived common masses view each other with a degree of hate and animosity. On the other hand the so called freedom of speech or abuse in the west is extremely hypocritical in nature. While Muslims are deprived of this freedom by banning headscarves, forbidding minarets of mosques, prohibiting circumcisions and criminalizing questioning of holocaust etc, others are allowed to wear hats, engrave tattoos and abuse
Muslim’s Holy Scriptures or Prophet with complete impunity. If the freedom of speech is just about saying anything regardless of how much violence it incites, then videos of Osama bin Laden, Ayman al Zawahari or the bomb making movies of Taliban also amply gets covered under the so called freedom of speech. Let us hope someone putting this freedom of speech to test by screening such videos in movie theatres at New York, Washington, Paris and Hague or by questioning as to how many Jews died in the Holocaust? Indeed such an action would never be permitted by the governments exposing their hypocrisy and lies on freedom of speech. These double standards cast an extremely negative shadow on the collective conscious of Muslims germinating seeds of hate and revenge against the west.

Muslims, especially in deprived countries once learn about the complacence of rulers with the West through wiki-leaks, their anger triggers into rage against their rulers be it the blasphemy or load shedding. Once these deprived masses try to avenge the representatives of states, willfully purporting this blasphemous campaign, and state machinery stops them by applying force, this rage is then unleashed onto the state, its symbols and the upper classes. Ideology, like religion, just becomes a catalyst in such kind of protests. The anatomy of this raging violence across the Muslim world, therefore needs to be understood in right perspective. If the right to abuse becomes acceptable under the so-called ‘freedom of speech’ then the killing of Chris Stevens should also be anticipated in display of ‘freedom of action’.

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