

Socio Economic Problems of Pakistan

The most beautiful moment in the life of humans is when someone of their own blood calls them 'mama' or 'papa'. Parents want to provide the newborn with the best of everything. He is pampered, protected and taken care of. The blissful period of childhood soon gets over, and the little human infant grows up to be an adult ready to face the challenges of the world he was born in. He sees around him with a hope of finding the same perfection in everything which his parents had provided him with. In no time, he realizes that the Utopian concept of a perfect world should be confined to the fictional Island created by Thomas More in his widely renowned novel only. That Utopia was far from reality and had nothing to do with the world around us. It's a world abound with countless problems- social, economic, legal, political, spiritual and the list goes on.

Certain social and economic conditions become a menace for the society when they start asserting negative influence on the society. Usually those social needs which persist in a society for long period of time without being fulfilled owing to restrained budgetary scenarios, they turn into socio-economic problems. The major problems of a society are linked with the providence of basic necessities of life to the people making up the society. If the basic needs of man- shelter, food and clothing are not fulfilled, the deprivation of these needs gradually transform into different forms of social menaces. In the context of Pakistan, owing to the fact that it is a developing nation, there is no wonder that it is engulfed with a number of social and economical problems. The real issue is not the presence of these problems in society because, as stated earlier, there is no concept of an ideal society in the world. Every country in the world has its own set of socio-economic problems. The main issue is the extent and intensity of the socio-economic problems of Pakistan which have soared to alarming levels. I will discuss some major social and economic problems that are of serious concern for social scientists and political economists.

A. Social Problems

Pakistan has been facing a lot of social problems since its inception in 1947. In the start there were the problems of lack of funds, rehabilitation of refugees, poor infrastructure and widespread poverty of masses. Quaid-e-Azam tried his best to solve these problems and get the state machinery working but due to his sudden death, he could not eradicate these problems completely. Subsequent governments didn't pay considerable attention towards solution of various social problems and thus they grew with the passage of time and became social evils.

At present the gravest problem that Pakistan is facing is its precarious law and order condition. Terrorism has become a headache for federation and a nightmare for public. Government has been helpless in eradicating terrorism despite beefing up security in metropolitan cities. Public seeks answer to the question that what is their fault for which they are being punished by the terrorists? People have become numerical figures, blown up in numbers every now and then. Terrorists have not spared any place. Bazars, mosques, educational institutes, offices, hotels- you name it and the place is not safe any more.

Besides terrorism there are other social problems which are older and more widespread. The biggest of these problems is poverty. 70% population of Pakistan lives in villages. Most of them don't have access to adequate basic needs of life. They are struggling for bread and butter. A large chunk of population lives below poverty line. They live in miserable conditions. Lack of proper food, clothing and shelter, poor sanitation, unsafe and sometimes contaminated drinking water are just some of their many problems.

Poverty itself gives rise to various other social problems. It deprives children of poor people to access education and healthcare. A sense of deprivation manifests itself in form of various crimes. That is why every now and then we read crime stories in newspapers that are characterized by lower orders of society who adopt illegal channels to get the financial prosperity which they can not achieve otherwise.

Illiteracy is yet another problem of Pakistan. The literacy rate lingers on 56% and ironically it also includes those people who can read and write their name in Urdu. Over the decades, despite decreasing, illiteracy rate in Pakistan has shown an upward trend. Not only that but enrollment ratio of students at primary level has shown a decreasing trend. The fact that 50 percent of children do not complete their primary education testifies this fact. Uneducated adults contribute negligibly to the national exchequer.

Despite spending millions on it, government has failed to achieve literacy rates comparable to other countries in South Asia. Private sector is doing commendable job for the promotion of educational culture in Pakistan, but its main objective is money-making.

Schools and colleges are opened as a business prospect and thus many of them lack quality.

Corruption is another huge social problem. According to latest report of Transparency International, Pakistan has been ranked at 42nd number among the most corrupt nations of the world. From clerical staff to higher offices and bureaucrats, all are involved in corruption of one kind or the other. Corruption in government departments is so much deep-rooted that a common concept prevails that the system doesn't let honest people to work peacefully. There is a lack of accountability due to which wealthy people and those in power are sure that they can't be held responsible for their deeds. So they keep on looting the national treasures and find ways to legalize their black-money. Many corrupt people don't even bother to do that.

Unemployment is also regarded as a major social problem. Major portion of Pakistan's population consists of youth and a large number of young people who have the ability and are willing to work are unemployed. Currently rate of unemployment as per official resources is 7.4% but according to some private estimates the rate of unemployment is 12%. There are many reasons of unemployment like influx of machinery that has replaced manpower, lack of new industries and defective education system. But the impacts of unemployment are more serious and dangerous. People who don't find work here migrate to other countries with better prospects. Also, people tired of making both ends meet due to unemployment indulge in nefarious activities and ratio of crimes increases.

Child labour is widespread in Pakistan. Whether in bigger cities or in small villages, we

find innocent malnourished children employed in various forms of labour. They are working as welders, mechanics, plumbers, electricians and in industries like carpet-weaving, glass and football making. Meager wages are paid to these children and no facilities for education are provided. Media and NGOs have always condemned child labour. In past, some countries refused to import those goods from Pakistan in whose making children were employed. But despite all these factors, due to growing inflation and poverty, parents are bound to send their children to work to light their stoves.

These are just few of the many social problems Pakistan is facing today. Population expansion has been a real issue of concern for all governments. With limited resources it is very difficult to cater to the needs of growing population. There is a great economic disparity among the people. Poor are committing suicides out of hunger while rich are busy amassing more and more wealth. These social problems directly affect the masses. Apart from these there are several economic problems which have broken the backbone of national treasury.

B. Economic Problems

Economic prosperity serves as a backbone for the overall progress of a nation. One thing is common in all developed nations- they are economically sound. When citizens of a country are freed from the worries of earning a livelihood to sustain their lives, they divert their attention to more useful things. They focus on education, improvise healthcare, develop technologies that make life easy and much more. Poor economic condition is the root cause of so many problems that exist in a society. Unfortunately, Pakistan's economic conditions are pathetic. As if power crises, lack of foreign investment for the development of industrial zones, backward and out-dated technology were not enough, Pakistan's indulgence in war on terrorism served as a fatal blow to the already crumbling economic state.

Result is that all our important industries that once served as an important contributor to the national GDP have been closed down. Sugar, cement and shoe industry is on its downfall while textile industry is breathing its last. Foreign investors are not ready to setup their businesses in Pakistan. They have their own set of problems which include painful and lengthy procedure of getting licenses and work permits in Pakistan, power crises, terrorism and declining exports. Multinational Companies are reluctant to open their offices and franchises in Pakistan. More than 70 MNCs have already packed up their business from Pakistan.

Stock Exchanges also depict a true picture of economic meltdown. Instable political system, dictatorship in its worse form and non-effective democracy badly affect the rates of stocks listed on the three stock exchanges of Pakistan. During this year, many times Karachi Stock Exchange has plunged to its lowest point in the history of Pakistan. Local as well as foreign investors are hesitant of investing large sums of money in stock exchange in fear of incurring unexpected loss. Stock exchanges showed very poor performance throughout 2008. Situation was so precarious that government had to freeze the market during last quarter of 2008. Also, recovery state of stocks is alarming. Earlier when stock market used to plunge, it would recover in few days or weeks. Now share

prices take a nose-dive and take considerable time to generate profits.

Rate of inflation was never a two-digit figure in Pakistan, but in recent years it has seen an unprecedented increase. Prices of all consumer products in general and food products in particular are rocket high. Core inflation soared to 18.85% in first quarter of year 2009 until SBP took steps to curb inflation through tight monetary policy. Cost of production increased due to various factors. International increase in oil prices and Pakistan's internal unfavourable business conditions are two important factors responsible for high rates of inflation. Consumer Price Index (CPI) as well as Wholesale Price Index (WPI) is at all-time high. In contrast, purchasing power of masses is at an all-time low.

Northern areas of Pakistan have been a place of great tourist attraction. The beautiful hills, the lush green valleys, shimmering lakes and flowing waterfalls brought many a tourist from all over the world to Pakistan. This contributed to foreign exchange. Tourism Industry was one of the booming industries of Pakistan. Besides attracting foreign exchange, it also provided employment to local people. Also, tourist industry was a source of friendly relations with other countries. Nevertheless, war on terrorism has served as a serious blow to the tourism industry of Pakistan. Local as well as foreign media has projected Pakistan as a dangerous and unsafe country. Its poor law and order situation has alarmed the tourist and thus Northern areas no more receive many tourists.

Due to war on terror, local people of war-ridden areas are migrating to other areas of Pakistan. Country has seen the largest migration since independence in 1947. These people have left their homes, businesses, possessions and property back home. This large influx of people and their rehabilitation is an economic burden for Pakistan. Unemployment is already prevalent and now the question of providing employment to these migrants has also become a serious concern. This portion of population is contributing nothing worthwhile to the national income yet they have to be benefited from it. This unproductive lot of people is a growing economic problem of Pakistan.

C. Remedies

Successive governments have taken steps to solve various socio-economic problems. But these problems are so deep-rooted that they have not been successful in putting an end to these problems. The problem lies in the fact that government focuses on one factor and ignores the others related to it. For example, much emphasis is laid on beefing up security in big cities in wake of terrorism. But nothing serious has been done to seal the unlawful entrance of arms from across the border. Acids and explosive materials used for destruction by atomic bombs are easily available in market at cheap prices. Ministers and other government officials enjoy the facilities of squads of armed body guards while public places like markets, roads, shopping centers, bus stands etc are not adequately protected. To control terrorism, government needs to stop fighting the proxy war on behalf of USA.

Secondly, there is a sheer need to curb corruption at all levels. The institutions of NAB and FIA should be made more powerful to curb corruption. Culprits should not be allowed to escape out of country. Rather strict punishments should be imposed on them.

Not only they should be strictly dealt with, but the wealth looted by them should be recovered and employed for the welfare of people. Judiciary should be an independent institution. Currently Pakistan has experienced a new era in the history of its judicial set-up. Judiciary is powerful but we have yet to wait and see the results of independence of judiciary in Pakistan.

Thirdly, poverty reduction should be top priority of government. Cottage industry and self-business should be promoted. Agriculture is the backbone of Pakistan's economy. It should be strengthened by providing loans to farmers. Free of cost educations should be provided to children in villages. Overall standard of living needs to be improved and inflation should be controlled.

Lastly, for economic development, energy crises should be controlled. New dams should be built and new methods of producing electricity should be utilized.

Conclusion:

As stated in the start , no country is free from socio-economic problems. These problems are present in every country but the winners are those who overcome most if not all of them. Though Pakistan is currently facing a lot of socio-political and socio-economic problems but it doesn't mean that it is going towards its end. Nations face multifarious problems but together they work for towards the solution. The same is the need of hour. Government as well as every single citizen of Pakistan has to play its own specific role to bring about a positive change.