We all need to do a little bit of soul searching to end corruption

By Parvez Jamil

A society where justice is purposely denied to a just cause or case through man-made laws, the law of nature comes into action. Penalties occur so silently or latently for the custodians turn breakers of law that it is not even realized as to when, where, when and how the wrath has fallen. The standard and stereotype definitions of corruption are nowhere close to the hidden reality and the bottom-line essence of corruption, including such apparently pertinent and commonly fancied specialized definitions of corruption as follows:

Merriam Webster dictionary defines corruption as “dishonest or illegal behavior especially by powerful people (such as government officials or police officers), the act of corrupting someone or something, something that has been changed from its original form”. Cambridge dictionary terms corruption as “illegal, bad, or dishonest behaviour, especially by people in positions of power”. English Oxford dictionary labels corruption as “dishonest or fraudulent conduct by those in power, typically involving bribery… action or effect of making someone or something morally depraved…”

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Professor (Emeritus) Dr. Petrus van Duyne says: “Corruption is decay in the decision-making process in which a decision-maker consents to deviate or demands deviation from criterion which should rule his/her decision-making, in exchange for a reward or for promise or expectation of a reward.”

Ufaq Memon, member of the CSS Forum Pakistan views Corruption as “a scourge that has badly affected the quality of governance, state of the economy and social justice available to the people. Corruption is defined as the misuse of entrusted power for private gains.”

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CONSPIRACY OF SILENCE

Practically, countless men and women, young and old, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, elite and the commoner are quietly guilty of violating some code of ethics but apparently look so busy in the normal business of life in what seems to be a conspiracy of silence to an inquisitive mind. For example, cheating to pass an exam, bribing to get a job done, misappropriating to earn an extra income, lying to win moral or material favors, blackmailing to make money or for fame, bluffing to bring home petty gains, intriguing to satisfy ego or for worldly ambitions or as a mere habit, plagiarizing to aim for an advanced level degree in higher education and research and so on.

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The law of the poor morality is shattered amid artificial values of the routine family, educational, corporate, social, economic and political business of life and the very legality of life is overshadowed by nefarious designs or ulterior motives through ready smiles, sweet talks, fancy dresses, lavish parties, gorgeous gifts or sugared-coated pleasantness. This is a civilized way of ripping a law ranging from a so-called minor traffic violation to a major drug trafficking act, from a little bribe or gratification for daughter’s marriage to an opportunistic embezzlement bonanza, from a casual sarcasm of an adversary to a sensational political assassination, so concealed yet so exposed.

MIGHT IS RIGHT

Amid neurotic ambitions; robberies, dacolties, kidnappings, rapes and murders know no bounds. The “hit and run” psychology of the criminals steals the show. But the law is watching and it continues to watch. While justice is done in many a case, mostly it is delayed. Justice delayed is justice denied. It is where justice delayed and denied is democracy denied. Many people lose confidence in law and leadership and join the mainstream of small and big crimes. That means crimes either in a conspiracy of silence or in an open grab, loot and kill.

But the law is watching and it continues to watch. While justice is done in many a case, mostly it is delayed. Justice delayed is justice denied. It is where justice delayed and denied is democracy denied. Many people lose confidence in law and leadership and join the mainstream of small and big crimes. At its predominantly worst scenario, it is said to be a ‘might is right’ law. Whoever is most powerful in the power of money, fraud, deceit, hypocrisy, politics and authority is considered to be a law. It takes a heavy toll of the guilty, toll in terms of restless days and sleepless nights, resulting in hyper-tensions, nervous breakdowns and heart attacks! That is exactly what the grab, look and kill psycho-social state of affairs reflects amid sheer helplessness of its intelligentsia and the law of the land.
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SO SHALL YOU REAP
Law is supposed to be over and above everybody and everything- This is true in principle and it is expected to be true in practice. As you sow, so shall you reap. As good deeds deserve acclamation, criminal acts need to be punished. Even the so-called democratic and civilized societies uphold the concept of penalties and punishments. On the contrary, it is a free for all in a lawless society where mere anarchy and sheer power crush the weak. Here there is moral, educational, social, economic and political stagnation and deterioration. There are countless innocent victims of blind justice desperately crying for justice. As such, the choice is clear, law or lawlessness!

While lawlessness has proved to be a plague of human society, law is regarded as the salvation indeed. It is believed that tougher the laws, the greater the checks and controls over crimes. But had even the toughest laws eradicated sins and crimes from society, there would not have been any dreads about criminals and sinners. It is more a question of obliterating negative thinking or criminal mind mentality from society.

INABILITY TO ACCOUNT
How can law-enforcing agencies create a law-abiding citizenship when society remains plunged in poverty, hunger, disease, malnutrition, illiteracy and ignorance? How can justice be dispensed with when trend-setters themselves lead in nepotism, corruption, exploitation, hypocrisy, glamour and false prestige? Justice is delayed when media and education are unable to inculcate positive thinking and produce good citizens towards the betterment of self and society. Justice is denied because of the inability of the elite or men at the helm of affairs to practice ethics, tolerance and fairplay in the normal business of life.

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Justice is conditional as it requires awareness in moral, social, economic and political culture through exemplary leadership, media projection and education policy according to the objective conditions of society. It is unwise and unjust for example, of merely beating of an innocent hungry child for stealing food, cursing a tradition-stricken father of bride for her daughter’s dowry, penalizing a landlord or a tenant on a house rent fight, punishing a few misguided youth for shop-lifting or girl-teasing, imposing fines or breach of traffic laws or rigorous imprisonment or capital punishment on major and heinous crimes etc.

CHALLENGE OF CHANGE
While crimes must be accounted for and criminals must be taken to task, accountability and awareness must go side by side. First, the concerned state machinery, from the head of the state through the judges or judiciary or the courts of law to the police must be accountable indeed. Those responsible for law-making, amending and enforcing are more responsible and accountable for their duties or deeds than ordinary people who violate laws and are rightly punished for their crimes. We must get rid of obsolete law procedures inherited from the colonial times and adopt a more objective approach in contemporary legal practice according to our usages, customs, traditions and conventions.

Secondly, the crying need of the times is nurturing and promoting mass awareness in human values, law and legal aspects of life. There could be no better way of doing it than through introducing concerned curricula in our schools, colleges and universities and launching special programs through radio, television, newspapers, books and magazines. There is no dearth of vision and expertise at our educational institutions and mass communication, and above all, with the concerned intelligentsia and the policy-makers. If there is a will, it is only a question of deviating to a more specific and informative approach to law and justice according to our own ideology and the psychology of the common man.

LAW OF NATURE
Imagine the heart, feelings and emotions of an innocent victim of blind justice. Think of a poor soul, with a just cause or case, so helpless, restless and merciless before the dead conscience of sheer power. Visualize men at the highest authority turning a deaf ear or offering mere lip-service to a rightful appeal. There may be such genuine cases who become sorry pictures of plight where vested interests of intriguers, exploiters and procrastinators reign supreme.

The unfair propositions justice delayed is justice denied and innocent victims of blind justice are rampant where ego, money, prejudice and pride have become the order of the day. Such a lawless state of affairs has afflicted routine life in a variety of ways. For example, sadly disheartening and disgracing a sport celebrity, badly sealing meritorious cases for educational and professional opportunities, negatively influencing decision-makers in dangerously misusing public time, money and property etc. At its worst it could be anything like injustice or tyranny by victimizing poor and weak at the corridors of law where might is right.

What else is terrible sleepless nights and restless days resulting in deadly nervous breakdowns, hypertensions and cardiac arrests! Is it not a natural humiliation for a sleeping conscience to be disgraced and discredited as permanent beggars of alms and charity in the name of grants and loans in the comity of nations?

While it becomes confusing or disrupting when pseudo-intellectuals look for excuses and label law and logic as relative terms, the fact remains that ethics and dignity are universal and right is right and wrong is wrong in human values.

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