

Weekend Read | Edition 51

Views on Family:

The Disruptive Aspect

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Mostly the family is considered to be a binding force for people; however at times it could at times be a breeding ground for disrupting society. This weekend read investigates the latter using Gallup's Survey '30 Years of Polling on Women, Family, Community and Formation of Civil Society' limited to the 2017 timeframe.

When it was examined in the survey if people share similar opinions as their parents, 80 per cent stated they share similar opinion in religion. 20 per cent said they don't. When it came to moral values, 72 per cent had the same values as their family and 28 per cent didn't. 68 per cent shared similar opinions on social issue and 32 per cent didn't. Lastly, 53 per cent shared similar opinions in politics and the other 47 per cent didn't.

One of the ways we will be interpreting this survey is in light of the recent incident in Swat of mob lynching of a local tourist who was lynched to death over an accusation of desecrating the Holy Quran. The lynching was based on a rumour, nothing else, revealing the wretchedness of the society. 23 suspects have been arrested based on the incident's CCTV footage. When the lynchers were asked what led them to partake in such heinous act, they identified their affiliation with the ideology of Tehreek -i- Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) which is a party with religious fundamentalist leanings filling the void of a formidable political force in Punjab, in particular. The official report of Interior Ministry also says that the perpetrators were in touch with TLP leadership.

A major takeaway from this example is that the family's role in inculcating religious values where tolerance with respect to religion is essential which is missing in recent times. In the past, as well, there have been many blasphemy-related cases where the minorities have come under fire and mob lynching has taken place. Family's role to teach religious values that minorities should be treated equally, with respect and there should be a sense of co-existence has not persevered. Therefore, it seems that when it comes to family's role in imbibing such values, the politicisation of Islam by certain quarters has triumphed. This dates back to the Zia ul Haq's era where religion was used to legitimise authority.

The second aspect that can be discussed in light of this survey is the political allegiances factor. This can be considered a new phenomenon in the urban context. Where, as opposed to the past, the youth votes and gives political support autonomously. Pakistan Tehreek -i- Insaf (PTI) has a big role to play here where women and children attended PTI's rallies on their own, holding their own ground even if they didn't receive support from the family. The rallies unlike those of other parties were more festive and family-friendly which made them feel more at ease and safe. This is something the scribe writes having attended of the rallies as a mere spectator.

However, it is not the same for rural areas where the political class or political families are closely knitted. A person from the Bilour family will pledge lifetime allegiance to the Bilours; Marris to the Marris and Mengals to the Mengals. There may be land feuds and other domestic differences but when it comes to politics there is unwavering loyalty. This is also how political dynasties persist which have recently come under immense ire of and resistance from the populace.

Additionally, when people were asked if overall, in their opinion, has the trend of respect towards elders increased, decreased or remained the same in our society, 35 per cent felt it has decreased. 28 per cent felt it has increased and 37 per cent think there has been no difference. This displays there has been more decrease in respect towards elders which may lead to certain disruptions in the society that one witnesses today. This is because elders have been seen as a guiding light within the family structure or even the guardians of the family. In the tribal and rural settings the respect might have remained the same with the Jirga system still prevalent but the story of the urban centres is something else altogether.

With the advancement in technology and exposure to the global culture and the world, differences in opinion and lifestyle maybe perceived as disrespect by many elders or those of conservative proclivity. One believes there has been a rise in individualism which the representative participants may consider as disrespect. However, individual thought and lifestyle should be seen as a personal choice and the capacity to break the shackles of invigilation of the elders at a certain point seen as a positive sign. As people move to urban centres and live on their own without the invigilation of their parents, they feel freer to make their own choices. However, then the question arises if those choices can be disruptive in nature such as the incident in Swat.

Sometimes age-old ideas of the elderly need to be done away with for the progress of the society. Going back to the survey, if we shed light on it, it portrays that in our country people still hold back to backward moral values where education is not a priority, especially that of the girls. One example is of rural Sindh where the government has officially accepted that 50 per cent girls don't go to schools and 50 per cent boys are school drop outs. 57 per cent of students after the middle school leave their education. Therefore, these children are bound by religious and moral values of the elders instead of education. The reason for resistance to education from the family could also be because there is a general perception that educated young people have more exposure to the society so they can come into conflict with the family values and structure. This usually occurs in the urban centres where the educated youth make autonomous decisions and sometimes part ways with their families or enter into disagreements in many aspects be it religion, moral values, social issues, or politics causing disruption internally that is within the household.

Home is considered a safe space and a peaceful abode but when such occurrences take place their implications can be seen outside the house. This is also how some disruptive forces emerge that may wreak havoc in the society and beyond; it is their catharsis or the need to find a sense of belonging which they cannot find within the family.

Another data in the survey states that some people get angry quickly whereas others are more patient so in people's opinions do they get angry easily? 21 per cent stated they get angry very easily, 29 per cent said somewhat easily, 29 per cent stated they usually don't get angry, and finally 11 per cent said they never get angry.

The primary example used in this weekend read of the Swat incident can be analysed using this data that anger as an emotion can serve as a driving force for people to turn violent but it is essentially their connection with other factors such as political leaning and opinions on social

issues that lead to such violent instances. The foundation of which may stem from the family. A disconnect from the family or vice versa which is if the family supports the same ideological facets of the fellow family members.

Many fundamentalist forces take advantage of disenfranchised individuals to fulfil their vested interests. People find meaning, sense of belonging, and at times higher self-esteem in asserting power over the weak segments of the society. This could be because they might have been made to feel helpless in their own homes, within their own families. This in no way one can offer justification for brutal crimes committed in the name of poor upbringing. Sometimes the apple falls far from the tree.

In the subcontinent as opposed to the west there is a different perception of family since in western countries if somebody, particularly a youngster, leaves the family structure the state provides for them. They don't need support from the family as such. To the extent, the family prefers that at the the age of 16 or 18 the youth find their own abode and family finds comfort in the realisation that their children are now independent. However, in the subcontinent, particularly in Pakistan the moral values take over and a joint family system is seen as a binding force. The country doesn't provide social security, hostels, affordable housing, and employment opportunities for the youth so they inevitably live under the watch and invigilation of the family.

Therefore, they undergo frustration and that might transpire into mental health issues which the family doesn't completely fathom. Unfortunately, in Pakistan we don't have authentic facts and figures about the so-called invisible social and familial problems which are hence brushed under the carpet. But even if we collect the figures then the question of the solution arises. The state remains in a constant state of immunity since we are not the welfare state Jinnah envisioned.



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