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The Other Side Of The Picture.

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Iqbal AHED's article in the "Dawn" of 27th September 1992 entitled "The question of right" regarding frontier post's seminar "Resettlement of Biharis" held at Lahore on 20th of September 1992 needs some comment.

Truth is generally many sided and complex. One sided over simplification distorts its balance and transforms it into a falsehood. this fact is known to the human race since sources of centuries. "Every truth has two sides. It is well to look at both before we commit ourselves to either" (Aesop 6th B.C., "the Mule" fables(. The American writer Henry ward Beecher was saying the same thing in the last century (1887) in different words "Pushing any truth out very far, you are met by a counter truth". The problem created by the demand for giving Pakistani citizenship to Lakhs of Beharis and for bringing them to Pakistan is a grave multi-dimensional and complex national problem. Mr. Iqbal Ahmed has chosen to reduce it to a simplistic and legalistic question of the so-called "Right of Citizenship".

He chooses to ignore the most important aspects of the multi-faceted issue. For instance:

1- Grant of Pakistani citizenship to lakhs of Beharis is a matter of concern not only to the government of the day but is a question of a grave national importance of historical proportions, being at the same time a question of life and death for over a crore of Pakistanis belonging to one of the four remaining founding peoples of Pakistan the Sindhis.

2- This earth is not just a no man's land and abandoned wilderness. The land, water and sub soil resources of the earth are not inexhaustible or ownerless. These are there simply because they have been possessed, protected and developed by individuals, communities, peoples and nations. Sizable number of people cannot go from one territory to another and take a share of its resources without reducing the share of those who are there since centuries with no where else to go and no other resource to share. One of the forms of uprooting historical owners of territories of the earth has been mass migrations of People complaining of being uprooted from their own historical homelands by more powerful neighbor as in the case of Arghoons, the Huns, the Scythians, the Aryans and the Mangols who begun as the invaded and the uprooted only to become the invaders and uprooters of others.

3- Sindh has just so much quality and quantity of resources which are less than sufficient for its own people who have been living here for over a score of centuries and have been protecting, developing and preserving these meagre resources with their sweat and blood during all these hard and merciless millennia.

4- The mass migration of Indian Muslims after the establishment of Pakistan to Sindh has already taken away a sizable chunk of Sindhi Peoples' historical national resources, reduced their percentage of the total of the population of the province and consequently their effectiveness as the owners of their historical homeland -Sindh.

5- The People of Sindh did not play the prominent role in the formation of Pakistan order to be reduced to a minority and the status of third rate citizens in their 5000 year old own home-land and to become

silent spectators of the plunder by all and sundry of its resources which they have defended throughout history against all comers the Greeks, the Arabs, the Arghoons, the Mughals and the British in order to retain them for themselves and their children as a national heritage and as their historical share of a slice of this good earth.

6- The Pakistan resolution which is the Political foundation stone of the struggle for Pakistan did not envisage putting of enormous Population burdens on and reduction of the economic Political and demographic status of the People who had volunteered to become parts of Pakistan. It may not be out of place to note that Sindhi people were the only People of those who eventually become Pakistani Peoples to have passed a resolution through their provincial Assembly in favor of the formation of Pakistan and in favor of their province becoming a part of Pakistan.

7- No people in the world including Biharis have any vested or moral right to go on changing their places of residence like shirts every other day at their sweat will, to go on abusing the hospitality of one people and thrusting themselves upon another when ever they like. They have had their choice after leaving Bihar, their birth place. They have had their chance to live in their new Bengali home in fraternity with their peaceful brothers, the Bengalis but for whose strong sense of religious solidarity, Idealism and valiant struggle for a separate Muslim home land in the sub-continent, Pakistan could never have come into being. That they failed to live or rather chose not to live with their Beengali Muslim brothers in peace and chose to help burn down their chosen homeland in fire and blood is not the fault of any one else muchless of the Sindhis so as to make them liable for the punishment of having a heap of human burning coals, which had already helped burn down half of Pakistan, to be thrown upon their already burning cottage.

8- To describe a person who has probably been born at or has at least passed the major part of his life at a place as being stranded at that place of his birth and breeding, residence and work would be the height of misrepresentation. Biharis have never seen what is now Pakistan, they have never set their foot on the soil of present Pakistan. They continue to live where they have always lived after the establishment of Pakistan and where a great number of them were born. How and where a great number of them were born. How and with what degree of justice can we arbitrarily invest such people with the title of "Pakistanis" and "Stranded Pakistanis" at that, defies imagination. Surely for being "Stranded" away from a place you must first have been there, at that place. To be "Stranded" away from what is now Pakistan, you must first have been living in what is now Pakistan- must have gone out of it for short while for some temporary work, business or pleasure, must have suddenly and unexpectedly been held up there and become unable to return to your original place of residence in the present Pakistan, say Ghara, Toba Tek Sindh, Karachi or Peshawar. May one venture to ask when and from which place of present Pakistan have these our Bihari Islamic brothers gone to Bangladesh and then suddenly have become "Stranded" there and thus have become entitled to the oft-repeated title of "stranded" Pakistanis.

9- One may repeat an untruth a million times from the house tops but it remains an untruth. Yes, someone did say "the great masses of the people will more easily fall a victim to a big lie than to a small one". And yes, we are not very unlike the Americans about whom Edgar Watson How used to say in the beginning of this century that they "detest all lies except lies spoken in public or printed lies". But surely men of conscience are expected not to forget what Aristotle told humanity more than a score of centuries back "Repetition does not transform a lie into a truth". Let us face it. The Biharis are neither Pakistanis nor "Stranded" out anywhere but continue to live at the same place where many of them have been born and bred and where most of them have passed the major part of their lives.

10- Without prejudice to what has been submitted above, there is yet another aspect of the question that too needs to be carefully considered. Every one knows that a number of both Urdu-speaking and Bengali-speaking people in East Pakistan were supporters of General Yahya Khan's disastrous military action

against the people of former East Pakistan. Every one knows that whatever the reason, lakhs of Bengali-speaking people of Bangladesh prefer residing in Pakistan to continue living in Bangladesh. In fact lakhs of Bengalis have already reached Pakistan illegally and are living and working here and are demanding the right of citizen-ship and full civil rights and facilities as Pakistani citizens, declaring like Biharis, their condemnation of the formation of Bangladesh and their support of General Yahya's action and their love for Pakistan.

11- Islam does not permit unjustified discrimination between Muslims on the basis of tribal or linguistic differences among Muslims.

12- If we say that we are giving, Pakistani citizenship to Bihars and settling them in Pakistan because they are Muslims, because they supported General Yahya Khan's military action, because they have refused to live in the Islamic Republic of Bangladesh and because they want to be settled in Pakistan, then surely we who have been talking so loudly, glibly and exuberantly about Islam, Islamic brotherhood etc etc, can not and should not be allowed to say that we are going to discriminate between those Muslims who speak Urdu and those who do not when both groups have the same credentials viz opposition to formation of Bangladesh, support to general Yahya's disastrous Military action, professions of love and support for Pakistan and the desire to be settled in Pakistan. If we don't wish to discriminate between one Muslim resident of former East Pakistan and another on basis of language, we have no moral or legal basis of language, we have no moral or legal justification to refuse Pakistani citizen-ship to any one who professes as much vociferous love for Pakistan, as much support for General Yaha's Khan's military action and as much condemnation of the formation of Bangladesh as any Bihari or any of his Pakistan supporters.

13- In that case we will have to give Pakistani citizen-ship to and accommodate at least over a crore of people from Bangladesh crippling our sociopolitical-economic fabric for ever.

14- Once a person is given the status of a Pakistani citizen there is no legal or constitutional justification or mechanism for restraining him from going and settling wherever he likes in the country. Experience shows that one immigrants legally or illegally come to Pakistan, they have always converged on Sindh causing torment and destruction to the People of Sindh in the form of over-strain on their already exhausted meagre resources, economic stagnation and decline, increased lawlessness, insecurity, ethnic terrors and resulting Socio-politico-economy paralysis.

15- No government of Pakistan or another federative state has the moral or political right to take any decisions which are bound to result in threatening the very historical existence of the peoples but for whose willing and ardent participation, the country could not have come into being.

16- I wish that instead of raising the question of citizen-ship in isolation to the pedestal of the super-god in utter disregard of all relevant historical, political, social and economic principles and considerations, people like Mr. Iqbal Ahmed would condescend to throw a glance at other relevant aspects of this grave and complex matter including the threatened extinction of people who are the inheritors of one of the oldest civilizations of mankind i.e. the civilization of Mohan-jo-Daro and whose only fault is that they believed and had faith in a Pakistan in which no injustice will be done to any individual or any people, where all prosper in peace under just laws, and advance towards a bright future for themselves and their progeny.

I wish Mr. Iqbal Ahmed in his great wisdom and generosity of spirit which he has been extending in some recesses of his noble heart a little, ever so little a bit of pity for the Sindhi people also who feel betrayed, oppressed and tormented and find themselves at the verge of extinction as a historical social

entity, in short a threatened social specie. Let us bear in mind the immortal words of the Italian Patriot Guiseppe Mazzini, "To be mistaken is a misfortune to be pitied but to know the truth and not to conform one's actions to it, is a crime which Heaven and Earth condemn."

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