

Counterview

Neoliberal patronage leading to 'sharp rise' in religious, cultural right-wing in politics

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The world is facing its deepest crisis after the world wars. The legitimacy of Westphalian international systems and their post-war reincarnations are falling apart. Political parties are losing public trust and people question their legitimacy. States and governments are becoming hostage and facilitators of neoliberal capitalism, where people live in an environment of unfreedom and market oligarchs enjoy absolute freedom.

There is huge rise of right-wing forces in society and politics. The neoliberal capitalist order is further aggravating the economic crisis. Masses are in the midst of a distinct period of crisis in contemporary world, where masses suffer in miseries and few people live in island of prosperity. It has exposed capitalist utopia. Wage stagnation, privatization of public resources, liberalisation of protective rules and regulations are leading to the concentration of political and economic powers in the hands of few.

The world is witnessing the highest form of material inequalities in history. Economic marginalisation, social alienation and political despondency are three defining products of neoliberalism, which provides life and blood to the right-wing forces.

The growth of right-wing politics is playing a fundamental role in reproducing and naturalising growing economic, social and political inequalities in the world. It did not happen overnight. It is neither an accident nor a natural phenomenon.

Large-scale acceleration of inequalities and marginalisation is a product of neoliberalism; a project of capitalism. It has transformed the society by dismantling its collective foundations. The unadulterated celebration of individualism led to the rise of a society where individual actions are shaped by the ideals of utility, pleasure and satisfaction.

These three features have become the foundation for the celebration of idealised individual achievements. The adoration of 'successful self-made men and women' has become gold standard for social, economic, cultural and political acceptance in the society. Selfishness has become a virtue.

The elites and their advocates have deployed such a neoliberal narrative to destroy the collective consciousness of people by which they exercise their illegitimate authority. The pestilence of loneliness and depression are the net output of neoliberalism.

Moreover, neoliberalism shaped popular consciousness that is separate from their material and

social realities. It detached people from their own past and present to sustain and pursue the idea of 'there is no alternative' to neoliberalism.

The neoliberal patronage led to the rise of religious and cultural right-wing forces in politics. These forces gave new meanings to individual life by promoting the idea of subjugation, supremacy, deaths and destitutions in the name of national interest. It has become a strategy of governance and control mechanism.

Such a strategy led to the rise of supercilious freedom in one hand and diminishing individual liberty on the other hand. The right-wing and reactionary forces assault the very idea of freedom that neoliberalism claims to promote. Such repulsive rise of contradictions is an integral part of neoliberalism as a project of capitalism.

Friedrich Hayek in his book "Road to Serfdom" (1944) argued that the government planning is destroying individual freedom. Hayekians have taken the argument further by stating that state and society act as obstacles of individual freedom. The Mont Pelerin Society was supported by millionaires and founded by Hayek to promote neoliberalism as a doctrine. The Hayekian legacies continue to reflect in the mission, vision and functions of the Cato Institute, American Enterprise Institute and Heritage Foundation in Washington DC, the Institute of Economic Affairs, Centre for Policy Studies and the Adam Smith Institute in London and many other neoliberal thinktanks around the world.

An unfair process is taking place globally by normalising neoliberal onslaught on both individual and collective spirit of freedom

These organisations and networks are funded by bankers, industrialists and billionaires to promote neoliberalism in the name of individual freedom and democracy. These thinktanks promote the idea that free market and its culture of consumerism facilitates individual freedom. In his book, "Capitalism and Freedom" (1962), Milton Friedman has argued in defence of economic freedom in a liberal society under competitive capitalism. His philosophy laid the foundation for market democracy which is opposed to very idea of democracy itself. Such an elusive idea of freedom for the sake of market became the foundation for the growth of capitalism since last two centuries. It is time to bust the myth.

Neoliberalism as a project conceals the limits of market and capitalism more and ensures kerbing of individual freedom both as a consumer and as a citizen. Freedom is not atomised individualism as promoted by neoliberalism. Our freedoms are interrelated and depends on each other. It is a process of collective realisation or collective surrender. So, it is important to decouple, rescue and articulate the idea of freedom and its collective spirit from the neoliberal and right-wing forces. Such a process depends on our collective desire to learn from the everyday realities of people and their interconnected experiences under different ruling regimes of capitalism.

The concerns of people, their collective consciousness and way of finding alternatives for determining themselves as 'being' and 'becoming' need to be articulated without institutional and structural barriers. The realisation of 'self-determination' both in its individual and collective form is the foundation of freedom and democracy that neoliberal capitalism and right-wing forces destroy.

The pluralist traditions of freedom and democracy are posing existential threats to capitalism and right-wing forces. Because both these forces depend on mass produced essentialist and functionalist claims, which domesticates freedom and democracy as per their myopic and illiberal world view.

Moreover, neoliberalism in history shows its affinity with dictators and authoritarian governments. The neoliberal economists from the Chicago School provided all their skills to Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet in revamping Chilean economy that ruined the lives of the masses.

American political theorist Wendy Brown, in her book "In the Ruins of Neoliberalism" (2019) has argued that neoliberalism laid the foundation for anti-democratic politics in the western world by dismantling the political and social basis of individual life. Melinda Cooper in her book "Family Values: Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism" (2017) has explored that the unholy alliance between neoliberalism and conservative politics.

Such an alliance promotes reactionary family values and moralities, which curtails individual freedom and dignity to promote market forces. The iron lady of neoliberalism in Britain, Margaret Thatcher once remarked that 'economics is the method: the object is to change the heart and soul' that is concomitant with the unchallenged interests of the market forces.

Such an ideological narrative breaks down society as a mere collection of self-interested individuals. It destroys democratic solidarity and social order in pursuit of freedom for the market. In this way, neoliberalism and unfreedom are intertwined and integral to each other.

The democracies are disciplining the citizens to pursue the interests of the capital. The welfare state is being transformed into security states to protect the interests of the capitalist classes. The operant commitments of the governments are to shift power from labour to capital.

Such an unfair process is taking place globally by normalising neoliberal onslaught on both individual and collective spirit of freedom. The objective is to continue the dominance of capitalism as an unchallenged global system. The propaganda machines of the capitalist classes are on overdrive to transform individuals into consumers and transform need-based society into desire-based society.

Such transformations are important for the survival of capitalism. It solves internal contradictions of capitalism due to over production. It liberates capitalism from crisis and imprisons labour within precarity of a desire-based society in search of illusive freedom.

The realisation of individual freedom and dignity depends on individuals' abilities to disentangle themselves from the economic clutches of neoliberal capitalism and political clutches of right-wing politics. There is no other way to achieve individual freedom that gives meaning to life both in its singular and collective visions.