

# **Upright Opinion**

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## **The American Paradise**

**By Saeed Qureshi**

Living in America can be likened to living in a man-made paradise. However, since where there is paradise, there should be a hell; America should have the other side too. As a model social welfare state, the galore of social benefits and civic comforts that America provides plenteously to its citizens is certainly unsurpassed and in that context, it can be equated with a placid and hazard-free life, as one would find in mythical heaven after death.

In this country, there is plenty of honey and milk and other delicacies. Those who cannot wait for the next world and are eager to enjoy such luxuries in this ephemeral abode, can come here and eat as much fruit they want and drink as much wine they can consume and indeed relish other enticements too.

Then where is the hell? Well barring certain oasis such as Europe, the world beyond America's borders, there are pockets of hell that owe their creation largely to this mighty super power. Presently, I shall not talk about the hell but I would rather dwell upon how Americans have created a marvelous society where from the rule of law to abundant provision of utilities and civic facilities have been guaranteed. The whole society is smooth, orderly, and an embodiment of exemplary governance. There has never been shortage of commodities ranging from the agricultural produce to posh cars.

America now as the sole super power has let loose the monster of imperialism on their perceived and declared enemies. The right and discretion of favoring, opposing, or labeling a country or an individual as an enemy or rogue, rests with the US. Thereafter, this country would go to any length and incur any cost to destroy that enemy. Since on the whole, it is a society of extremes, two parallel opposing currents run together. This country gives the maximum liberty, but would not hesitate to punish even the most powerful in case of a violation.

The system of governance is run on both fear and respect of law. The law takes its course without any let or hindrance. A rapist would get the heaviest sentence from a decade to several decades in jail. A molester of children cannot escape either with the whole or better part of his life in jail. Tax evaders cannot dodge the iron hand of the most dreaded Internal Revenue Service (IRS) no matter how smart or influential one claims to be. No one can solicit nor tamper with official business notably with judicial proceedings.

There are grey areas in the legal domain. Here are lawyers that do not prepare for the case, charge exorbitant fees and keep the case lingering on as long as they can. They would keep fleecing the clients by charging from a sheet of paper to an appearance in the court. My empirical experience in the court proceedings is that the prosecution wins most of the cases.

There appears to be some tacit quid-pro-quo and understanding between the prosecution and the defense, which in civil cases ends mostly in a so-called plea bargain. A plea bargain is invariably

detrimental to the grieved party, as at the end of the day, justice is not served but a forced compromise is solemnized.

The jury system in which a panel of pre-screened individuals gives their collective and unanimous verdict declaring the offender either a guilty or not guilty is prima facie a kind of tempering with the bona-fides of the case. The jury members are not necessarily well-versed in legal matters, but their opinion formed in matter of hours, can change the outcome of the case that on occasions may be interpreted as unjust.

The plethora of arguments and hard work of lawyers over a prolonged period on both the sides, stand nullified as the jury could unpredictably (some members impulsively) tilt towards either side. The best option should be to leave it upon the judge to hand out a verdict to be reviewed by a judicial committee comprising legal experts.

Those Americans whose income is below a certain level are eligible for food stamps that take care of their grocery and kitchen budget. Most of the low income groups are covered by the state sponsored medical programs. Even gratis or pro-bono legal advice and help is available for those who cannot afford the heavy billing on legal suits. These are the safety nuts that are doled out as part of the basic fundamentals of a social welfare society as the United States is.

Barring the infrequent crimes that no society can root out conclusively, including the American society, composed of three distinct and divergent ethnic communities. These communities are white Americans, the Afro-Americans, and the Latinos. Besides there are fringe races from other parts of the world as Indians, Pakistanis, Arab, Africans, and Viet-Names etc.

There would be grouse and aversion in hearts between these ethnic groups but no one can express it openly as discrimination, and racial prejudice is prohibited by law and can be challenged in courts. As such, there is a visible peace and racial harmony, which is good as it covers the society with a fabric of homogeneity and togetherness.

One would not find ubiquitous presence of police, either traffic or those dealing with crimes. The dread of police officer runs into the veins of the citizens. One would find one lone traffic sergeant on highways. Still the traffic would be orderly and within the bounds of mileage fixed by the state law. If the commuters feel they have been wrongly booked, they can challenge the traffic police officer in the court.

The business and social life continues round the clock in United States. You can buy a gallon of milk from a store even at midnight. Sale of liquor to the underage citizens is a serious crime with condign punishment. Nightclubs are closed at 2 o'clock at night and liquor cannot be sold in the stores after 9 o'clock.

If there are, nightclubs or people take liquor then that whose faith does not allow such luxuries, should not label these societies as immoral because primarily it is their social culture. Fundamentally, it is capitalist cum secular culture that does not intrude in religious matters and pursuit of pleasures, albeit within the bounds set by law.

It is not a perfect society. There are street crimes and gang wars for drug and money and prostitution and trafficking of manpower across the borders and within the mainland. However, it is not pervasive and is dealt with effectively by the law enforcement agencies. There are homeless by choice and because of bad habits. The prostitution is there but is legally prohibited. There are no red-light areas as one can find in the vicinity and under the shades of the Lahore's Shahi Mosque. What a macabre contrast: mosque and prostitution dens existing side by side.

The pleasure of riding on the spacious and multi-lined, highways is a boundless boon that would not be so bounteous elsewhere as in America. It is a country that is a conglomeration of 50 states (District of Columbia is in addition), each one like a country by itself. Many states are bigger than many countries in the world. These states though part of a federal structure, are administered on a kind of self-rule and with maximum autonomy and with least interference from the federal government.

The city and country system that is in vogue in America should be emulated elsewhere as a model for exemplary local governance. With one small application costing \$ 15, one can establish a business that in the third world countries take years and after payment of hefty kickbacks for getting permission. The city governments keep the environment tidy, provide clean water round the clock, run recreation centers, maintain streetlights, and strictly watch the compliance of countless codes that cover from the length of the grass in one's lawn to building of commercial plazas. One needs a strong resume to get a job, which in simple words one should qualify for the job.

The banks, the fire-fighting departments, the city police, the emergency health services, and all other public institutions work with utmost efficiency and zeal for public service. The ambulance can be summoned in a moment and even police is called in case of a danger. No one peeps into or visits others' houses without prior appointments. The pursuit of happiness as enshrined in the American constitution is followed in letter and spirit. All the religions are given equal freedom of worship. We go to our mosques fearlessly, and without a paranoid, that someone would bomb us.

But alas! One pernicious happening has changed the spirit of booming bonhomie, freedom, and individual liberty that one could smell in yester years in the atmosphere and around everywhere. Following the catastrophe of 9/11, the magnificent United States is overcast by specter of a deep and unending paranoid, fear, and suspicion about the incoming and outgoing foreigners. The most repugnant display of this drastic and maligned impact can be witnessed at the airports. Hardly a decade ago, these airports were so open for free movements that a passenger could even go nearer to the aircraft without being checked or stopped.

At first, they installed scan machines for everyone to go through for entering the boarding or sterile areas. It was followed by ban on taking any liquid. Still another prohibition came not to take any lotions and batteries. Then the shoes had to be taken off. Then came the full body screening which of late is augmented by a pat down which means touching even the private body parts of both females and males.

Most recently even the unaccompanied baggage has been added to the pre-screening. One almost walks into the waiting lobbies naked as if with a feeling of helpless and shame. The incoming passengers are subjected to an exasperating drill of both decent and indecent questions that one cannot refuse to answer.

The surveillance, eavesdropping, and wiretapping are no more considered as a constitutional violation or moral infringement of privacy. The cell phones and private conversation are overheard to find clues to the hidden terrorists. An alien caught against perceived or real suspicion can never be released and there is no precedent that one walked out of the court as a free person. The foreigners mostly coming from Pakistan, Middle East and other Islamic countries, carry the stigma of being the probable suspects for anti-state activities.

In retrospect, I wish if that pristine golden period returns to America so that once again every one can bask in mirthful environment that generated inner happiness, peace of mind, felicity of movement, clear conscience and unruffled mind defined as American spirit. I wish 9/11 would have never happened. I strongly feel President Georg W Bush should have never invaded Iraq. I also yearn if America would have never left Afghanistan in lurch after the exit of Soviet Union from Afghanistan.

Despite these aberrations, America is still a wonderful country. This country offers a splendid model of good governance to the civically backward countries in regard to uplifting their municipal and local bodies systems. Those societies can learn from America how to turn themselves into social welfare states, create formidable network of roads and craft efficient institutions and honest public servants for the benefit of the citizenry.

I earnestly wish that someday, by some divine intervention or unexpected miracle, once again the peace, goodwill, trust, and mutual respect between United States and her opponents are reborn. Is it wishing too much?

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