**Rioters, Rebellion and Revolutions**

[Aliya Anjum](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/aliya-anjum/)

June 8, 2023

The late Ambrose Bierce, a prolific American author, said, “The partisan strife in which the people of the country are permitted to periodically engage does not tend to the development of ugly traits of character, but merely discloses those that preexist.” This sums up the events of May 9, 2023, which will forever be marked as a Black Day in Pakistani history when a populist demagogue led his followers to attack military and civil institutions, structures and symbols.

Ambrose Pierce’s words draw our attention to the character traits of Pakistanis in 2023. We are living in an era where social media has brought the world together like never before. Political correctness is the order of the day. The zeitgeist of the times is to self-regulate the baser instincts in human behaviour. The Black Lives Matter movement, being woke and being called out on politically incorrect words or actions is happening the world over.

In Pakistan, we are oblivious to these trends. Hypocrisy and double standards have seeped into our bones and the average Pakistani demands for himself what he denies others. We mask our frustrations as righteous indignation and channel our anger towards unrelated entities.

This is what happened on May 9, 2023. The man who broke the gate of Radio Pakistan, Peshawar station, sold the iron structure to a scrap dealer. He had no awareness of the immoral and criminal nature of his actions. He simply derived gratification from being able to vent his frustrations from living in a country where the life of the common man is very difficult. When asked why he supported a leader who wreaked havoc on the nation, he repeated the trite phrase about the demagogue being against corruption. To this man, his corruption was a huge blind spot. He was not concerned about his immoral actions. He is as much a perpetrator of corruption, as those he hates for being corrupt but he does not self-reflect to be aware of his moral failing.

The zeitgeist of the times is to self-regulate the baser instincts in human behaviour.

Pointing the finger at others is all that mosque sermons and television political programming has ingrained in the nation.

This man’s actions represent a majority of the country who apply a different set of rules on themselves and upon others. What they habitually do to others, they take grave offence when the same behaviour is meted out to them.

The American civil rights movement leader Martin Luther King Junior was widely inspired by the non-violent civil disobedience movement of M.K Gandhi in India. Gandhi’s movement was based on moral strength and hence it resonated with the entire world. Gandhi is revered internationally and Western academia pays homage to his political methodology. When Gandhi stood against the British he rejected British-made goods. He was a lawyer but he used the traditional Indian handloom to weave his cloth and he ate simple food. There was no hypocrisy in Gandhi as a leader. He practised independence before he preached it.

Martin Luther King Junior was also an inspirational leader who continues to be a symbol of moral courage and righteous action. He is revered for his principled stance. For Martin Luther King, nonviolent direct action was all about constructive, creative engagement. The goal of his movement was not anarchy – even though how he led through civil disobedience – but justice and peace. Non-violent direct action is the optimal point between doing nothing – except being an armchair critic – and going ballistic. Demagogues make people aware of tolerating abuse and goad them to return it with more. True leaders teach non-violent action, which sets people free from a cycle of perpetual unkindness.

Direct action has to have a moral basis for a movement to be just and righteous and hence successful. Awareness of abuse must lead to self-purification before public protests can take place.

The most common tendency of a demagogue is that of placing all responsibility on some external agency for failures, abuses and losses. This appeals to the common Pakistani as it absolves us of all responsibility towards the sins we have committed or mistakes we have made. Pakistanis have hence become conditioned to forever attempt to find some scapegoat on which to cast responsibility.

There was no one filled with more righteous indignation than the Black African American community in the United States during the times of segregation. These men and women were living lives of utter subjugation and abuse. Martin Luther King did not choose the path of rage and revolt because he knew that evil cannot be fought with more evil. He took a moral position, which was key to his success. He said, “Courage is an inner resolution to go forward despite obstacles. Cowardice is submissive surrender to circumstances. Courage breeds creativity; Cowardice represses fear and is mastered by it. Cowardice asks the question, is it safe? Expediency asks the question, is it politic? Vanity asks the question, is it popular? But conscience asks the question, is it right?”

In Pakistan, no leader, no Islamic preacher and no media person stress morality and conscientious behaviour for personal accountability and responsibility. Leaders and preachers egg on their followers to shift blame and hate on others.

The common Pakistani lies, cheats, violates, abuses, argues and attacks others. Yet, he wishes to live in a society where he is safe from deception, abuse, attack and suffering. These double standards are truly appalling. This propensity to violate others for an ego trip and being proud of such actions as having gained the upper hand is the root cause of our socio-economic misery and suffering. The first step towards change must be to develop one’s conscience. It is only when each of us achieves this state that we can become a progressive nation. Any and every other political effort is only chasing a mirage.

*The writer is an independent researcher, author and columnist. She can be reached at aliya1924@gmail.com*