**The need to kill an either/or narrative**

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‘Young lawyers must not engage in bar politics’, ‘Professional lawyers have nothing to do with political culture in the legal profession’, ‘If you want to be a good lawyer, stay away from election candidates’. These are some of the popular statements that keep floating within the legal community as well as in the society at large. Although these statements are shaped by real instances and circumstances by far, I am afraid they are playing a significant role in shaping the future of legal profession as well in Pakistan. Therefore, it is apposite to deconstruct and reconstruct a lot of narratives with regards to politics in law and practice in law. One major notion that needs to be addressed is an Either-Or approach in legal practice and politics. Also we need to shift our discourse from discouraging young lawyers to take part in politics by identifying politics as something unethical or deviant.

The recent attack on the Chamber of Chief Justice Islamabad High Court is yet another example of why politics, particularly bar politics, needs to be redefined in our country. It is yet another incident signifying the dire need of an efficient regulatory capture within bar associations and bar councils. And, above all, it is another serious sign of declining professional ethics within the segment of society that needs to safeguard civil and political rights of the citizens.

Lawyers like Asma Jahangir have already set an example of taking both politics and practice hand in hand. Both politics and practice can and should run simultaneously

Ransacking judges, court staff as well as litigants at certain times is a common practice of lawyers since past few decades. It is highly unfortunate and condemnable, to say the least, that even superior judiciary including chief justices are not safe from this behaviour anymore. Not only that, this behaviour seems to gather pace at a considerable rate which itself is alarming.

One of the major reasons behind this is the narrative that after entering into the legal profession, either you do politics or you do legal practice. Majority lawyers believe that you have to choose from either of these two and then follow the path that you opt. If you show interest in bar politics, you are going away from real legal practice and vice versa. There is no stress or focus on managing both at a balance. One of these, legal practice, is generally believed to be the path of professionalism and intellectual exercise. The other, politics, is considered the job of people who intend to build a power and pressure group rather than their practice. It is widely believed in the legal circles across Pakistan that these two categories are mutually exclusive having a hard distinguishing line between the two.

Lawyers who practice actively believe that politics is not their ‘job’ and that it is nothing but ‘goondaism’. They consciously stay away from political culture and do not generally participate in the election process as well. On the basis of this bifurcation, less people with critical thinking and progressive minds take part in bar politics and are able to hold key decision making positions in bar councils and associations. Resultantly, the legal profession as well as legal education is longing for reforms and up gradation in line with global standardssince decades. Despite the election campaigns going on throughout the year, no one pays heed to any of the serious issues faced by the legal profession. A huge number of lawyers particularly those working in big corporate law firms are completely disassociated from bar elections, taking negligible interest in the overall development of legal profession. I believe that such fragments within the legal community are equally responsible for incidents like that in Islamabad because of their complete disinterest in bar politics and elections.

It is a high time to realise that we need to reconstruct the image of bar politics and start encouraging more people to enter into politics of bars at local, provincial and national level. It is also pertinent to create a balance between politics and practice and shatter the notion of either politics of law or practice of law. Lawyers likeAsma Jahangir have already set an example of taking both politics and practice hand in hand. Both politics and practice can and should run simultaneously. Each and every member of the legal fraternity should be politically aware and exercise the right to vote after consciously knowing the candidates and their manifestos. Being a member of the legal community, it is the duty of each member of the bar to take serious interest in bar politics, stay politically aware and play due role in shaping the future of legal profession by striking the right balance between politics and practice.

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