**Resume of a doer**

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PML-N's sympathizers spent all of Thursday – July 13 – on social media reminding us about a most significant event in the party’s history.

Exactly five years ago, on July 13 in 2018, Mian Nawaz Sharif and Maryam Nawaz, the father-and-daughter duo that personifies the Noon League today more than they did then, were arrested upon their arrival in Lahore from London. The images around that journey have been played with varied intensity since then as the party tries to shrug off the political baggage it has been burdened with, all courtesy of a rival who ended the unchallenged stint of the Sharifs, particularly in Punjab.

Today the Sharifs, especially Mian Sahab and Maryam and to a lesser extent Hamza Shahbaz, are painted as warriors for democracy who have paid a big price for their struggle against oppressive rule. Scenes of them being incarcerated on allegedly trumped-up charges, and of them confronting physical and emotional pain of the other kind, are routinely flashed.

But whereas this account may have firm roots in the turmoil these Sharif family members have found themselves in, this does not fall under the classic narrative that had celebrated Sharifian politics in the country. This is for the simple reason that the family of traders which rose from Gawalmandi in Lahore, had to make little effort of their own on the way to occupy centre-stage in Pakistan's power games.

There were others who did it for him as Mian Sahab made his ascent after he was picked for the leadership role by the then-governor Ghulam Jilani on orders from his boss Gen Ziaul Haq in the early 1980s. For many decades to come, Mian Sahab’s assignment was to deal with an opponent always keen on not just reinforcing but building their political appeal entirely around the personal sufferings of their leaders as well as less famous activists belonging to their party.

The PPP had these images in abundance and used them without any inhibitions. Shaheed Baba was followed by a long line of martyrs extending up to Shaheed Rani and beyond including more members of Z A Bhutto’s family along the way. This was really stuff that did leave sympathetic souls devastated and still has a profound effect on many. This was ammunition the Sharif camp was devoid of and the manner in which they consequently conducted themselves in the political arena added to their reputation as unemotional, even unexciting, dukandaars (shopkeepers).

Even moments of potentially high political drama were not exploited and could not rival in their appeal even the not so major ‘emotional moments’ in the history of pathos-savvy PPP. Instead, the image of the Sharifs that emerged in contrast to the jiyala-flavoured PPP ideal put emphasis on what was hailed as the Sharifs’ development model. They were cast as ‘men who were out to deliver’, in a ‘non-feudal’ manner as opposed to Benazir Bhutto and company that were painted not just as corrupt but as power-seekers who refused to come out of the past, forever stuck in the glory of their sacrifice.

This was a tricky situation. It seems that an over-reliance on the refrain that praised its historic sacrifices and struggle could well have made the authors of the PPP strategy with less appetite for finding more current references to woo the people. The main beneficiaries of this tragic flaw in how the PPP, a party which has no doubt suffered so much at the hands of so many who stood united against the Bhutto name, had to pay a huge sum should remember what they must not repeat.

The PML-N must not allow the mention of the personal loss and suffering of the party’s leader to eclipse the other strains in the story. It must not give up building on threads that attempt to portray it as a party of doers, a party of leaders more adept at it than any one else in the fray.

The PML-N must persevere with this line, and must shun the obsessive romance with moments of personal pain of its leadership since it is one party which can vouch for the fact that the times did change somewhere down our political path. There was once a country whose people voted on the basis of who they believed deserved to be on the throne, based on the accounts of their valour and the kind of oppression they had to face at the hands of their cruel detractors. This now is a country that wants its rulers to listen to what the people want.

Much as the people of this country today value sacrifice and want to see yesterday’s victims to triumph ultimately, they are just too selfish or just too aware to quietly side with those who have been to jail or those who left behind a wife on the sick bed to pursue their politics. As habitual seekers of public office, they would be far better off with a resume that highlights their ability to govern.

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