**Altar of apathy**

Mir Adnan Aziz

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Dr Aftab Ahmad from Kanganpur was a self-made person. Doing odd jobs, he earned his MEd from Allama Iqbal Open University, MPhil from Government College University Lahore and PhD in Chemical Engineering from University of California with publications on nano-engineering.

Dr Ajmal Sawand from Kandhkot, Sindh, got his BE in software engineering from Jamshoro’s Mehran University. He did his masters in Computer Science from Jean Monnet University France and his doctorate in Artificial Intelligence from the Paris Descartes University. He also remains the first ever Pakistani elected to represent PhD students of the University Paris Descartes in the Research Commission of France.

Apart from the hard work and dedication that went into securing their academic excellence, both these young men chose to leave behind lucrative offers and careers and returned to serve their motherland. Such are the people who truly build a nation. Dr Aftab took up a position as a lecturer at Government Dayal Singh College, Lahore. Dr Ajmal joined IBA’s Sukkur campus as an assistant professor. Having no qualms whatsoever of the promising life they had left behind, both reveled in their choice to serve their country.

These role models could have done so much for Pakistan but for the tragedy that is the insignificance of our lives here. On his way to college from his rented house near Chungi Amar Sidhu on a bike, a kite string ran around Dr Aftab’s neck, snuffing out the extremely precious life on the spot. Dr Ajmal, travelling from Kandhkot to Sukkur, was ambushed and died from 11 gunshot wounds. Shockingly, the assailants filmed the incident and rejoiced with aerial firing.

Shahida Raza was a member of Pakistan’s women national soccer and hockey team. A sole bread-earner of the family, she was mother to three-year-old Hasan who could not speak or move unaided. Shahida’s husband had divorced her because of their special child. Despite her national status, she was jobless and could not afford the treatment and care of her son. One can imagine her agony as she left her son behind and paid human smugglers for an asylum seeking trip to Italy.

The horrendous journey started as she was put on a 20 meter boat crammed with 200 other migrants. Tragically, the boat crashed near southern Italy, resulting in the death of the desperate mother. The chief minister of Balochistan expressed grief over Shahida’s death saying she had brought honour to the country. He should have said that her agonizing ordeal and death was an indelible mark of dishonour on the faces of each one of us.

The eerie similarity in the achievements, aspirations and extremely tragic and senseless end of these young people epitomize the Pakistan of today. Dr Aftab died because police officials failed to enforce a kite flying ban whereas Dr Ajmal’s brutal murder was a continuation of an unchecked honour feud between the Sundrani and Sawand tribes that have seen seven murders in the last four years alone. In both instances, as has become a norm in Pakistan, those responsible to protect and better the lives of the people brazenly flout the same. They only submit to the personal biddings of their political masters.

Shahida’s drowning is the indictment of Pakistan itself; a state that forced her on a fatal journey leaving behind a son whose welfare shall see the same criminal apathy. What could be more heartrending?

‘Ochlocratie’ is a Latin term meaning the rule of the general populace or mob rule. In order to prevent this, the ruling elite went to great extents to please the Romans. One gimmick was the ‘ludi circenses’ or the circus games featuring gladiatorial fights and exotic exhibitions. Our parliament and political talk shows could put the Roman Caesars’ to shame. The other trick to keep the restless people in check was called the ‘annona’, wherein people were offered grain free or at reduced rates. This is where the famous term ‘panem et circenses’ or bread and circuses originated from – something to keep the public from showing violent discontent. .

This bread and circuses farce has been the bane of Pakistan. Governance requires a moral authority for enforcement. Ruling dispensations renege on their electoral or takeover promises and lose this authority, something that they seemingly relish. In our system, the moral authority of government and parliament simply does not exist anymore. The primary responsibility for governance and ensuring the rule of law remains with the government; it is something no administration can abdicate, justify against or pass on to anyone else.

Nations are built by deliberate choices and prudent policies of truly representative governments. These develop an inclusive society that protects and ensures the fundamental liberty, security and prosperity of each individual. Our present predicament is an accumulation of decades of mal-governance. Institutions are the name of the game that ensures rule of law and a viable nation.

Our power elite should understand that they are the only ones who have benefited grotesquely from this land. The best of doctors, as of everything, are at their beck and call here and in faraway exotic lands. This dichotomy has the people at a breaking point. Can mob rule be far behind? The fate of the Aftabs’ and Ajmals’ is a deterrent for anyone yearning to serve the motherland. Shahida Raza’s sacrifice for the wellbeing of her son was one many are forced to give on the power elite’s altar of apathy. Is this the callous Pakistan our founding fathers dreamed of?

The writer is a freelance contributor. He can be reached at:

miradnanaziz@gmail.com