**People behind dynasties**

BY A S H A `A R R E H M A N 2020-11-27

LAHORE is still struggling to understand the phenomenal rise in its midst of a man named Khadim Husain Rizvi. To a majority of the people in the city he came from nowhere. Unlike, of course, his son who has succeeded him upon his death.

As local honours go, Khadim Rizvi was a hurricane who played out his brief, successful actionpacked turn against and in aid of well-established Lahore actors. Though his campaign had religion at its base as he came out in defence of Mumtaz Qadri, the killer of governor Salmaan Taseer, his speech increasingly took on a political colour.

In time, as governments changed, the target became the PML-N. Even though Khadim Rizvi`s cause may have been different from that of the PTI, he did create a parallel plank that ultimately favoured Imran Khan against the Sharifs at a crucial time.

The thousands who had gathered around Khadim Rizvi`s flag complemented anyone who was after the Sharif government. And indeed when the Tehreek-i-Labbaik Pal(istan (TLP) decided to contest the general election of 2018 on a countrywide level, one argument made was that for a sizeable portion of votes of angry, disenchanted Pakistanis that Khadim Rizvi`s candidates would be drawing from the same anti-status quo support pool as the PTI nominees.

At over two million, the TLP`s vote tally in its debut general poll was stunning. It served as a dire warning for all political parties in the country much beyond the Lahore and Faizabad venues where Khadim Rizvi had brandished his power. It also vindicated his position as a Sunni aspirant who did not know what tone and tenor was required to catapult his madressah-based group to the level of a popular political party, but who was ready to enact the role of that leader down at the square.

The ambition was there for long. Those in charge of TLP cadres did not press the case persistently enough. Khadim Rizvi`s rivals in the TLP group, led by Ashraf Asif Jalali, had shown an inclination to claim political space by participating in elections in the past but without luck.

Most famous of them all is the case involving Ashraf Jalali`s brother, Abid Jalali, who passed away in July 2020. You may find the name AbidJalall among the minor candidates with a handful of votes for the 2013 general election from the Lahore constituency in which Shehbaz Sharif had won. But over a decade earlier, the same Abid Jalali had almost scored an upset victory against a political heavyweight with as much publicity as that surrounding the development of Khadim Rizvi during the period 2015-20.

The story has been recounted more than once in these columns. It was a lesson in how to sabotage unwanted partnerships among big power groups.

Chaudhry Aitzaz Ahsan, who fought that electionin 2002 as Benazir Bhutto`s nominee and Mian Nawaz Sharif`s ally by virtue of being his lawyer barely survived a dark, underground challenge from Abid Jalali, a Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal candidate in the contest no one had accorded any importance. In the end, it was Aitzaz`s 27,000-odd votes against Jalali`s 24,000 or so.

Abid Jalali was a young man when he put up that unlikely fight. There is little evidence the Jalall faction showed any inclination to use that spark to ignite a career in politics. They waited until Khadim Rizvi, perhaps his passion intensified and his determination reinforced by a road accident that paralysed his legs and forced him through a phase of depression, rose from within their own ranks to mal(e them irrelevant in the eyes of the more action-inclined.

The old guard in the Labbaik did make an effort to recapture territory from Khadim Rizvi, but even though they were loud in their appeals to public sentiment, they couldn`t quite match the oratorical formula that the Rs20,000-a-month cleric from amosque near Data`s shrine had perfected.

Khadim Rizvi reverently addressed Iqbal as Qalandar Lahori and the great poet repaid his passionate follower by allowing him constant company that helped raise the cleric`s stock exponentially.

The Qalandar didn`t leave him even when he was up against it in the most sensitive periods of his campaigns, and the TLP head fiercely resisted any attempts by rival camps to claim and promote Iqbal as their own.

In time, these opponents and rivals included a certain Imran Khan who was now in power and had to deal with all those who challenged his writ, allamas among them. Khadim Rizvi roared in anger in reaction to what the new prime minister had to say about religion, advising him curtly to go through the teachings of Imam Ahmed Raza Khan and other greats first. And he was agitated to find the prime minister advising people to follow Iqbal. Of course, he knew that the prime minister was copying him.

While he lived, it looked highly unlikely that he required inspiration or lessons from anyone from the old guard to polish his persona. He was more a reaction to than a culmination of the happenings in his own camp over the last couple of decades a point reflected in his angry falling out with the Jalalis who belong to the robust Sunni mainstream and who might be looking to reassert now that Rizvi is gone. Other factions are also shaping up with a claim to set the TLP`s priorities right just as political veterans such as Shehbaz Sharif would be wanting to quickly use this period to open an account with the new TLP chief, Khadim Rizvi`s son, Saad Husain Rizvi. A PML-N delegation led by Khawaja Saad Rafique has already called on the 26-year-old successor, with the young man alternatively trying to very tentatively invoke Qalandar Lahori to his defence in his first television interviews.

The news about established orders and dynasties eats up all our time. Much else that`s brewing deep inside will remain concealed, harbouring God knows how many Khadim Rizvis wanting to smash the idols. We need to listen more intently to the sermons. The writer is Dawn`s resident editor in Lahore.