

Shifting social paradigms

Society & S. Probi

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OUR society is in the midst of a paradigmatic shift. The imperatives of 'progress' have brought with them western influences and values that often conflict with our traditional practices and principles. We find ourselves in a position where we are neither willing to fully embrace nor fully reject modern western values.

Similarly, we cannot bring ourselves to wholly give in to our traditional conservative customs and beliefs nor do we wish to shake loose from them. Our westernized values do not allow us to condone the confinement of women by chadar and char-devari nor do our traditional values allow us to establish a permissive, westernized society. Consequently, we currently inhabit a social wilderness in the vast grey area somewhere between the two extremes.

The fact that a large segment of our society in the rural areas is lagging far behind the urban centres in terms of development and enlightenment serves only to exacerbate the tension and conflict between these two sets of values giving rise to heated debate on issues like karo-kari, honour killings, etc.

I had the opportunity to attend a seminar on honour killings in Karachi recently. It was exactly as I had expected: Everyone came with pre-conceived notions and views based upon the distorted, thoroughly biased reports of the press and media. Without any real first hand knowledge of the issue, some of the participants proposed that the jirga system should be abolished while others felt that new

profession and segment of society. This would make a mockery of our legal system. The laws that exist on the books are quite adequate. We just need to implement them.

Modernization and the evolution of a social conscience and morals is a natural process that all advanced western societies had to go through as well. There was a time in the United States of America when innocent men and women were accused of practising witchcraft and were either drowned or burned at the stake in the now infamous Salem Witch Trials, which even had the sanction of state authority. Our authorities may turn a blind eye to instances of karo-kari and honour killings but at least they do not officially sanction them. But, like the US, we, too, have to pass through this stage of social evolution. It is unavoidable.

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cuts and we can only expect to courts young boys and brutally murdering them and then dissolving their bodies in a large vat of acid should suffer the same fate as his victims? Did we allow that one ruling to cast a shadow over the whole legal system resulting in calls for the abolition of the judiciary? If these instances can be generally regarded as exceptions to the rule then why must all attention be focused on the narrow negative aspect of jirgas while the good they do is conveniently and summarily overlooked?

The fact of the matter is that the whole civic, administrative, judicial and law enforcement system in Pakistan has collapsed and there exists a vacuum of authority. People are left at the mercy of civil servants, police and judiciary that are either incompetent, disinterested or corrupt to the core and are incapable and unwilling to solve their problems. The people have no choice but to turn to the Sardars, who provide instant relief.

A few years ago, a serious feud between the Kalhora and Nareja tribes on the border of Khairpur and Larkana districts had made the area a no-go area for law enforcement agencies and had resulted in the loss of thirty-seven lives. The authorities were totally helpless to do anything about it and finally the SP Khairpur approached my father, Sardar Mumtaz Ali Bhutto, to resolve the conflict in a jirga. The jirga took place and the conflict which the authorities could not resolve in three or four years was resolved in three or four hours and peace restored in the area.

Whereas serious conflicts arising from matters relating to property, business dealings, blood feuds etc. are neglected by the authorities and drag on in for years, they are

Perhaps the transformation of our society will not take as long as it did in the West since the path has already been blazed before us. But there are no shortcuts and we can only expect to expedite the process so much without distorting the natural forces of social change. Change will come but impetuous rashness can be counter-productive and can produce a whole new set of problems.

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