

against honour killings need to be enacted.

As I listened to one absurd suggestion after another, I could not help but wonder how many of these people had actually set foot past the toll gates on the National Highway into interior Sindh, let alone have an in-depth knowledge of the subject on which they wished to present themselves as self-styled experts. Obviously, there can be no difference of opinion with these drawing room philosophers as far as the sanctity of human life and the discontinuation of archaic and medieval customs is concerned. But the question 'what needs to be done?' produces a dichotomy of views. We are talking about something as sensitive as social and cultural reform. We cannot callously ~~machete~~ our way through historical, traditional values with reckless abandon.

Morality, social beliefs and cultural values cannot be legislated or imposed by law. The history of legal systems around the world and the writings of eminent jurists illustrate that at any given stage in the evolution of society laws reflect the values that are held supreme in that society. It is social values that dictate laws. Laws crystalize and emerge out of cultural norms and customs.

But laws cannot dictate social change. Whenever a law comes into conflict with or contradicts a widely observed social custom, invariably it is that conflicting law which becomes a casualty and is discarded by either lack of observance or, in extreme cases, is overthrown by means of revolution. This is what most people fail to understand and feel that every issue can be resolved by passing new laws.

In 1976, the National Assembly passed a bill by which the sardari system was abolished. But it could not be implemented because it came far before its time and conflicted with prevailing cultural norms. The fact is that we do not need any new laws. Murder is already a crime in Pakistan.

It is absurd to clamour for a law specifically banning the killing of women. In that vein, we would need to pass specific and separate laws prohibiting the killing of doctors, industrialists, lawyers, businessmen and every

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.

It is customary to hold the sardars, so called 'feudals' and the jirga system responsible for everything, from bird flu to sunspots. The sole sources of information for most urbanites are the press and media, which present sardars and jirgas in a completely convoluted and highly prejudiced image. For instance, an impression has been created that jirgas and sardars encourage honour killings. Nothing could be further from actual fact.

When a karo-kari matter is brought to the attention of a sardar, there can be no question of anyone killing anyone after that point. Any sardar worth half his salt would ensure the security and safety of the accused at a neutral location before proceeding with a jirga in which, if the charges are sufficiently corroborated with evidence, monetary fines are imposed and the girl in question is handed back to her parents who are made to take a vow to protect her from all harm.

Killings sometimes take place when a karo-kari matter is not brought to the sardar's attention and even then the sardar plays a pivotal role in the resolution of the matter. It is absurd to suggest that sardars themselves promote and encourage honour killings. Such sardars would not only lose face among their peers but also lose respect among their followers.

Of course there are always rotten apples in every barrel. There may be some sardars who pronounce distasteful rulings in jirgas, but they are the exception rather than the rule. Are there no hopeless quacks in the medical profession who cause the deaths of far more patients than any jirga ever could? Are there no shyster lawyers in the legal profession? Are there no unscrupulous industrialist who exploit child labour?

Have we already forgotten the judgment of the Anti-Terrorist Court in Lahore a few years ago which ruled that a man who had been found guilty of abducting

resolved within a matter of a few hours in jirgas to the satisfaction of the concerned parties. Why is this aspect neglected? If jirgas are banned, then what will become of the people who will once again be tossed at the mercy of a system that is not working?

If disputes and feuds are not resolved quickly and effectively, that will only result in an increased number of killings and more law and order problems as people will be forced to take the law into their own hands. At the conclusion of the above mentioned seminar, a resolution was tabled against honour killings. Though I certainly abhor the taking of human life for any reason, I could not support this resolution because it went on to demand the abolition of the jirga system.

The jirga system goes against all that my western education has taught me. But on some occasions a serious case surfaces which needs to be resolved quickly as lives are at stake. In such instances it becomes very difficult to turn people away. The only way to get rid of the jirga system is to revamp and revitalize the administrative, judicial and law enforcement system. Once that happens, the jirgas and sardars will automatically become obsolete and redundant. But it cannot be legislated out of existence as long as it is the sole safety net for the hapless and desperate common man.

It is the misfortune of the representatives of the traditional way of life, whether they be sardars, waderas or the so-called 'feudals', that they are fragmented and disunited and have failed thus far to collect on a common forum to face the ridiculous, indeed slanderous, allegations that are levelled against them and to promote their own values and customs.

They are being attacked mercilessly from all directions, yet they have failed to put up a defence due to their unfortunate disunity. If this state of affairs does not change this disunity and fragmentation will be their undoing. This is no skin off my nose since I hold no brief for either side. I have only said what needed to be said.