

Many families live in walled compounds with watchtowers so they can keep an eye out for their enemies. We knew many victims of feuds. One was Sher Zaman, a man who had been in my father's class and always got better grades than him. My grandfather and uncle used to drive my father mad, teasing him, 'You're not as good as Sher Zaman,' so much he once wished that rocks would come down the mountain and flatten him. But Sher Zaman did not go to college and ended up becoming a dispenser in the village pharmacy. His family became embroiled in a dispute with their cousins over a small plot of forest. One day, as Sher Zaman and two of his brothers were on their way to the land, they were ambushed by his uncle and some of his men. All three brothers were killed.

As a respected man in the community, my father was often called on to mediate feuds. He did not believe in *badal* – revenge – and would try to make people see that neither side had anything to gain from continuing the violence, and it would be better for them to get on with their lives. There were two families in our village he could not convince. They had been locked in a feud for so long no one even seemed to remember how it had started – probably some small slight as we are a hot-headed people. First a brother on one side would attack an uncle on the other. Then vice versa. It consumed their lives.

Our people say it is a good system, and our crime rate is much lower than in non-Pashtun areas. But I think that if someone kills your brother, you shouldn't kill them or their brother, you should teach them instead. I am inspired by Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, the man who some call the Frontier Gandhi, who introduced a non-violent philosophy to our culture.

It's the same with stealing. Some people, like me, get caught and vow they will never do it again. Others say, 'Oh it's no big deal – it was just a little thing.' But the second time they will steal something bigger and the third something bigger still. In my country too many politicians think nothing of stealing. They are rich and we are a poor country yet they loot and loot. Most of them don't pay tax, but that's the least of it. They take out loans from state banks but they don't pay them back. They get kickbacks on government contracts from friends or the companies they award them to. Many of them own expensive flats in London.

I don't know how they can live with their consciences when they see our people going hungry or sitting in the darkness of endless power cuts, or children unable to go to school as their parents need them to work. My father says that Pakistan has been cursed with more than its fair share of politicians who only think about money. They don't care if the army is actually flying the plane, they are happy to stay out of the cockpit and sit in business class, close the curtains and enjoy the fine food and service while the rest of us are squashed in economy.

I had been born into a sort of democracy in which for ten years Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif kept replacing each other, none of their governments ever completing a term and always accusing each other of corruption. But two years after I was born the generals again took over. It happened in a manner so dramatic that it sounds like something out of a movie. Nawaz Sharif was prime minister at the time and had fallen out with his army chief General Pervez Musharraf and sacked him. At the time General Musharraf was on a plane of our national airline PIA coming back from Sri Lanka. Nawaz Sharif was so worried about his reaction that he tried to stop the plane from landing in Pakistan. He ordered Karachi airport to switch off its landing lights and to park fire engines on the runway to block the plane even though it had 200 other passengers on board and not enough fuel to get to another country. Within an hour of the announcement on television of Musharraf's sacking, tanks were on the streets and troops had taken over the newsrooms and the airports. The local commander, General