

Theorizing Discourses and Challenges to a Feasible Democratic Process in Pakistan

Muhammad Mumtaz Ali Khan*
Mazher Hussain**

ABSTRACT

Democracy in Pakistan has shown considerable stability after Musharraf's turbulent epoch. The Civil-Military relations have also improved and democratic process made its own way. Contrary to the expectations as well as repercussions of the global pundits about the fate of the democracy in Pakistan and its survival as a sovereign state, the democracy was strengthened and deep-rooted. The current study is an effort to find healthy relationship between different available discourses on democracy and the prevailing political culture in Pakistan. Moreover, it is meant to find out a viable solution of the predicament or challenges to the democratic process in Pakistan. The available arguments have been carefully analyzed and presented to respond to the hypothesis, "If the democracy is required to be strengthened, it has to be transformed through the reshaping of its political culture." Hence, the study provides

* Director, Research and Development, PHEC, Lahore. Email: mumtaz.ali@punjabhec.gov.pk

** Associate Professor, Department of History, The Islamia University, Bahawalpur. Email: dr.mazher@iub.edu.pk (Corresponding Author).

all the necessary directives and details in an argumentative manner.

Introduction

Democracy as a Consociational Phenomenon and the Third World

The term 'democracy' has been defined, interpreted and even understood "differently" in the third world. The reason behind is the longevity and arduousness of the historical process which prevaricated its nature as well as functioning. This phenomenon has resulted into a deep-down disconnection in its theory and practice leading towards daunting complexities and problems. Globally, the democracy must be based on principle instead of mere practice. The political scientists agree that the democracy must be consociational rather than a "differently democratic" jargon and it must command the value, compromise, cooperation, tolerance and patience. In a democratic political system constitution provides such "consociation" which prevents the tyranny of majority elite group over the minority and protects the rights and liberties of every individual in the state uniformly.

The third wave of democratization has greatly altered the political landscape of the world after 1980s.¹ The fall of communist regimes gave birth to new democracies which later proved more consolidated than the older historical ones. As far as the people in the developing countries are concerned, they are merely dictated by their economic wants. Therefore, they neither prefer democratization nor take democracy as a political system.

Whereas political culture signifies that the entire individuals normally have the identical levels of understanding of their rights, orientation towards political objectives. They believe in political socialization and political participation and fully understand that political participation, representation and

¹ S. P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma, 1993), 16-17.

political alternatives do not pose different orientations in democratic semblance.²

In Western democracies, people are source of authority. They elect their representatives to represent and safeguard their interests in the institutions. Government formation and functioning on majority-rule, transfer of power from one political party to another is orderly and lawful. Rule of law is a fundamental democratic idea as it defends social, economic and political rights from tyranny and lawlessness.³

Furthering the phenomenon of Western democracy, the liberal democracy necessitates the free market economy, and open and free civil society. It promotes and protects the civil liberties through positive use of government authority.

Democracy, especially in the Third World, requires three features to develop i.e. political institutions, political systems and political pluralism. Without these factors, it may be difficult for democracy to survive or thrive. Now the question arises how these features can be developed. The very concise answer lies in the fact that in the third world elitism prevails which is a big hindrance in the way of developing political institutions on a strong footing resultantly democracy slowly converts into a non-democratic system, or more plausibly a mixed regime state.⁴ Moreover, democracy as political system appears as a representative one, which creates an oligarchy, professional political elite.⁵ The Third World democracies lack political pluralism too. The main reason behind is the political elitism which keeps people away from political participation and inclusion.

2 David Held, *Nine Models of Democracy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 67-71.

3 Heywood Andrew, *Politics* (New York: Macmillan, 1997), 166-168.

4 Fareed Zakaria, *The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad* (W. W. Norton Inc., 2003), 211.

5 Carnelius Castoraidis, *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy: Essays in Political Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 29.

Feasible Democracy in Pakistan: Theorizing Discourses and Challenges

Pakistani form of democracy is true representation of “Third World” democracy, however, with host of different problems and prospects. The political history of Pakistan is shadowed by long military authoritarian rule. It is an irony of fate that Pakistan could not evolved a political culture which could have given the sustainability and stability to the problematic political system of Pakistan.⁶ Since its inception, democracy in Pakistan remained a riddle for us. It is both boon and bane for us. It is what this research is going to examine with reference to Pakistan.

True democracy, vibrant civil society and opportunity of fair governance can only succeed when democratic attitudes, orientations and political values are allowed to prevail in the political system of the country through the object political culture. Pakistan’s politics, right from beginning, has been remained undemocratic with feudal political structure in place, inherited after the independence. Over the years, its political culture has been riddled with chaos, instability, changing loyalties, lack of consensus on political and constitutional matters and undemocratic role of political parties.⁷

The political culture of Pakistan is a decisive link between the economic development and the liberal democracy. The economic development is a *sine qua non* for sustainable democracy. The political culture cannot flourish without a vibrant economy and cultural values as they together can create vital civil society. The democratic ideals, freedom of expression, equality and rule of law have not been truly embedded in political culture of Pakistan, and resultantly it gave birth to problems in a democratic state of Pakistan.⁸

6 Safdar Mahmood, *A Political Study of Pakistan* (Lahore: Sheikh Muhammad Ashraf, 1975), 17-21.

7 Mahmood, *A Political Study of Pakistan*, 36.

8 Ghulam Kibria, *A Shattered Dream: Understanding Pakistan’s Underdevelopment* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 108-109.

This research paper deconstructs these problems or such impediments, predicaments or hurdles in the way of political system of Pakistan.

It is an historical fact that the political culture has been evolved in the West through the centuries.⁹ Every country of the world has a unique political culture: with widely shared values, norms and beliefs that describe the relationship between citizens and state, and among the citizens of the state. These values and norms are necessary part of the political culture because politics of the country affects economic life of its citizens. A sound political culture of any state can pave the way for sound political system.¹⁰

The people living within the mainland of Pakistan comprise many societies, composed of more than one factor. There is a variety of religious sects and factions, ethnic and linguistic groups, the ruling elite class with aristocratic designs, and deprived and destitute poor classes with rural urban discrimination. Seemingly, Pakistani nation is held together by external compulsion or by sheer necessity or by the dint of the historical factors.¹¹ These and many other phenomena put a question mark on the rationale of national unity. This can be further explained by analyzing the factors that have cultivated the regionalism and provincialism in the country, which led to the succession of unstable governments, and were held responsible for the creation of Bangladesh.¹² Furthermore, the periodic eruption of religion and ethnic tensions that at times led to the bloodshed and lawlessness in different parts of the country is basically the by-product of

9 Maurice Duverger and Barbara North, *Political Parties: Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State*, tr., Robert North (Islamabad: National Book Foundation, 2000), 13.

10 Allan McGrath, *The Destruction of Pakistan's Democracy* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1996), 16-18.

11 Richard Symonds, *The Making of Pakistan*, 2nd ed., (Lahore: Islamic Book Service, 1987), 89.

12 K. B. Sayeed, *Pakistan: The Formative Phase 1857-1948* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1978), 150-151; see also K. B. Sayeed, *The Political System of Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1967), 48-59.

historical process as well as cultural variations that lie beneath the surface and ready to be ignited time and again.¹³ Religion played a vital, rather decisive role in the struggle for a separate homeland.¹⁴ Although there were many other factors yet religion overlapped and masterly controlled the circumstances. In the context of Pakistan, different religions and different sects establish the mindset of Pakistani people.¹⁵ This is so because of the mistaken conception about the religion.

There is a variety of philosophic arguments to show that the religion needs not be the cause of disunity. On the other hand, secularists argue that the Pakistan Movement was motivated by secular rather than religious considerations and, henceforth, religion should cease to be the bone of contention. They take Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah's address to the inaugural session of the first Constituent Assembly of Pakistan (CAP) on August 11, 1947, as the guiding principle in this connection. However, it is to say that the prime and sole motivation for pre-partition Muslim people was a well-defined vision of an Islamic state to be run according to an Islamic constitution. Later, it was doubted on the grounds that how could the various sects with their sharp theological differences agree on the nature and contents of an Islamic Constitution?¹⁶ This issue, being a controversial one, needs a lot of elaborations and discussions and plays a decisive and key role in the voting and decision-making process of the country.¹⁷

Another factor, as important as religion, which grips over the people of Pakistan, is the multifold language phenomena prevailing as an indigenous problem right from the time of

13 Sayeed, *Pakistan: The Formative Phase 1857-1948*, 152.

14 Sayeed, *Pakistan: The Formative Phase 1857-1948*, 153.

15 Symonds, *The Making of Pakistan*, 89-90.

16 Ahmad Mushtaq, *Pakistan at the Cross Roads* (Karachi: Royal Book Company, 1985), 31.

17 McGrath, *The Destruction of Pakistan's Democracy*, 43.

country's inception.¹⁸ Here an attempt has been made to discuss and analyze different issues associated with the language as well as the language controversies that have caused dissension between linguistic groups.¹⁹ Specifically in Pakistani perspective, any effort made for the political solution to the problem of separate linguistic groups by the imposition of a common language alien to the majority of those groups, was always seen with an eye of suspicion.²⁰ This is true in case of East Pakistan that never sacrificed to the imposition of Urdu, as a notional as well as official language of the United Pakistan (1947-1971).²¹ It was considered just a temporary solution instead of a long-term remedy. Unfortunately, no planned efforts from the beginning were made to develop a naturally emerged mode of communication to take the place of the arbitrarily imposed language, ultimately leading to the development of more cooperative and more united Pakistani people.²²

The third major issue that puts a remarkable question mark on the soundness of the unity in Pakistani nation is the defective education system. The British introduced in India, an education system which was calculated to leave the critical and constructive abilities untouched, meant to develop a personality servile and unquestioningly subservient to the colonial masters.²³ Pakistan came into existence with the same legacy and no effort was made to get rid of this education system. The role of education in national life is overwhelmingly critical and decisive. The education, on one hand, inculcates those moral values which enables an individual to utilize his/her knowledge in the

18 Tariq Rehman, *Language and Politics in Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1996), 79-80.

19 Khurshid Kamal Aziz, *The Making of Pakistan: A Study in Nationalism* (Lahore: IBS, 1976), 89.

20 Tahir Amin, *Ethno-National Movements of Pakistan: Domestic and International Factors*, 2nd ed., (Islamabad: IPS, 1993), 13.

21 Amin, *Ethno-National Movements of Pakistan*, 22.

22 Amin, *Ethno-National Movements of Pakistan*, 23-24.

23 Rehman, *Language and Politics in Pakistan*, 34.

national interest while on the other, it should impart knowledge having social utility.²⁴ Unfortunately, the country's education system lacks both these roles. In Pakistan, elite class has developed its own separate education system to fulfil its specific, aristocratic, hegemonic and despotic designs. This is, on one hand, discriminatory in nature and content while it is feudal and oligarchic on the other,²⁵ while, on the other, ordinary folk is compelled to attend such institutions where education is imparted without emphasizing on the exposure of critical and constructive abilities of the individual. This situation has given way to a culture that has become highly superficial and imitative and the country is compelled to import experts to solve the problems.²⁶

The lack of quality education creates a number of problems for the masses who generally do not know their legitimate rights and thus fall prey to the stakeholders in power play. It is a dilemma that the use of power in our society is arbitrary. In a society where effective checks against a misuse of power do not exist, a highly selfish and individualistic ethic will emerge, preventing the development of a common sentiment that, in turn, will lead to the disintegration of society.²⁷ The existence of arbitrary power in Pakistan explains the lack of identity with the national interest not only at the individual but also at the provincial level. Provincialism, for instance, also exists because some provinces feel that the central government is misusing power against their interests and no checks have been introduced against the misuse of power. The fact is that, no matter what institutional checks are introduced, they cannot be made operative without bringing change in the attitude of the people. They lack the spirit of law abidingness. Even best laws introduced in a society, lacking education, are to be

24 Rehman, *Language and Politics in Pakistan*, 34-35.

25 Amin, *Ethno-National Movements of Pakistan*, 69.

26 Amin, *Ethno-National Movements of Pakistan*, 69-70.

27 Ahmad Rashid, *The Resurgence of Central Asia: Islam or Nationalism*, (Karachi: OxfordUniversity Press, 1994), 213.

continuously violated.²⁸ Similarly, whether we give complete freedom to the judiciary or the press or introduce checks against the misuse of power, it will continue to be misused if the people are not educated in the right spirit. The greater check against the misuse of power is the internal and not the external, as the check and realization of responsibilities come only through education and mental training.²⁹ Above mentioned factors, in Pakistani perspective, constitute the mindset of the people and motivate them how they behave in voting and participate in the decision-making process of the country.

The remarkable changes in the class structure of the country have been observed in the post-Partition milieu. Industrialization and urbanization as well as flow of the remittances from overseas resulted in the emergence of a new class phenomenon, a bourgeois proletariat of the cities and towns, multi-ethnic, multi-sect, resistant to structural changes. Majority of people, having rural background, do not contribute to the change in objective conditions in their localities.³⁰

As far as the weakness of political institutions is concerned, this is one of the inherent problems that country faced in post-1947 milieu. This weakness stemmed from lack of political exposure of the leaders. Especially, the All India Muslim League that had emerged as the sole representative of Indian Muslims had nominal experience at the mass level. Most of its leaders, especially the landed aristocracy of Punjab had joined the party during the last two years or so to save their vested interests in the face of imminent partition of India.³¹ Hence, the political party culture, being the soul of

28 Rashid, *The Resurgence of Central Asia*, 214-215.

29 Rashid, *The Resurgence of Central Asia*, 214.

30 Javed Jabbar, *From Chaos to Catharsis: Perspectives on Democracy and Development* (Karachi: Royal Book Company, 1996), 34.

31 Muhammad Khurshid, "Pakistan Mein Intikhabi Amal aur Assemblion ki Shakist-o-Rekht," (Urdu: The Electoral Process in Pakistan and Dissolution of the Assemblies), *Mujallah Tarikh-o-Thaqafat Pakistan*, NIHCR (April 1997-September 1997): 8-9.

democracy, could not gain ground in the country. Politicians who were the master controller of the nascent state had no culture of mutual cooperation and coordination to deal with party conflicts, intra-party democratic norms, and internal checks in the wake of the use of arbitrary power and realization of responsibilities in the greater national interest.³²

The same case was with the provinces, with the exception of East Pakistan which had a long experience in parliamentary democracy,³³ while the leaders of other areas that came to constitute Pakistan had little or no experience of participating in political institutions.

This phenomenon can be proved with the fact that it took almost nine years to deliberate and negotiate for a constitution. Even after the promulgation of the 1956 Constitution, the political scene was marked by frequent squabbling among politicians that led to short-lived governments in the country.³⁴ This situation gave way to the freakish but active role of the civil and military bureaucracy. For instance, Malik Ghulam Muhammad and Iskander Mirza both were the civil and military echelons.

The above discussion also puts a question mark on the legitimacy of the political parties, participating in the democratic process of the country. Is there any kind of internal democracy within the structure and functioning of the political parties? Reportedly until 1986, all the political parties combined, were estimated to command just one percent of the country's adult population as total membership i.e. less than 450,000 out of 45 million adults

32 Khurshid, "Pakistan Mein Intikhabi Amal aur Assemblion ki Shakist-o-Rekht," 9-10.

33 Khurshid, "Pakistan Mein Intikhabi Amal aur Assemblion ki Shakist-o-Rekht," 10.

34 Robert Jackson, *South Asian Crisis* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1975), 13-18.

while the estimated fee-paying members were about half a percent.³⁵

Now comes the question why and which party to associate with? And it will be both complex and complicated one to answer this question on the grounds that the parties have different criteria to be offered to the candidates and members to join. The first and foremost criterion for the selection of a party is its ideological position and its ultimate agenda to improve the quality of life.³⁶ Beyond the secular and theocratic distinction, there is a notable similarity in the overall theme and intent of the manifestoes of the parties. Both the leftist and rightist parties claim for the social welfare and economic uplift but they have failed to give a solid line. Leftists try to infatuate against the US imperialism which the rightists, especially the religious parties fail to distinguish between the need for national modernization and the pressures of westernization and are unable to comprehend the nature of contemporary changes in civilization, the result is more chaos.³⁷

Searching a Viable Democratic Solution

It is true that democratic culture that exists in the West is totally different from that of ours. We inherited bureaucratic system from the British which was essentially an institutional arrangement and it has nothing to do with the growth and development of our democratic culture. Democratic culture is all about freedom of expression, freedom of responsibility, human rights and raising the level of consciousness of the people. In the West, political culture promoted democratic culture.

The Indian subcontinent has never experienced the democracy before the arrival of British, as after the British control in the region, a limited type of democratic practice was introduced through constitutional means i.e. the

35 Jabbar, *From Chaos to Catharsis*, 46.

36 Duverger and North, *Political Parties*, 142.

37 Duverger and North, *Political Parties*, 151.

Government of India Acts of 1909, 1919 and 1935. After the independence in 1947, our political arrangement was centralized and controlled democracy was introduced in the country. The political parties, political elites, feudal and religious political parties did try to destabilize the political system of Pakistan with the tacit support of establishment.

Historically, the political culture of Pakistan has its relationship to the pre-Partition British rule. What the British rule left behind was a contradiction between theories of governance and their real practices. The ideals of representation form of government and equality before law were defective transformations. The early territorial conflicts, social and cultural differences, power sharing arrangement among different institutions of the state and death of the founder of Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, were the facts which created hindrance in the way of policy-making elites to introduce the true democratic procedures. This scenario encouraged the feudal, the power-hungry political elites and non-democratic elements to take hold of the helm of affairs of Pakistan.

The characteristics of political culture of Pakistan appears to be a handiwork of the heritage of British judicial and administrative values, parliamentary practices, religion and ethno-regional cultures, shared cultural values and attitudes of the public, and last but not least the role of political elites, feudal and outside factors. Therefore, in Pakistan, people's believe in total democratization of culture is evolving and it may take some more time to reap the benefits of democratization.

Since inception, the search for a stable democratic system has been haunting the minds of our rulers with no tangible remit. Having held a number of elections after independence, there are certain precedents where losing candidates put a question mark on the entire process. A very good example was denial of the results of 1970 elections. The point is, our political and democratic cultures are two different things. Our political culture with privileged things

and reforms has been a feudalistic culture with some blending given to us by the British royals. It is a mixture of both imperial democratic culture and feudal political culture.

What was the purpose of creating a political entity called Pakistan? To answer this very question, a discussion in 1946 between Muhammad Ali Jinnah (1876-1948) and Beverley Nicholas, an eminent British Journalist of 20th Century can be quoted in which Jinnah presented a counter-narrative thereby saying, "Nicholas do you want a prosperous England under German domination or free England poor." Nicholas' immediate reaction was, "Mr. Jinnah! I have got the answer." Jinnah perhaps wanted socio-economic freedom and political freedom to avoid Hindu domination in a democracy given to us by the British imperialists.³⁸

Fractured, flawed and fragmented political system, structured feudalism apathetic people, self-imposed leaders, colonial practices, inherited political values, inefficient corrupt political leadership in general, poorly performing democratic disorder and undemocratic traditions are the major hurdles in the way of functioning of liberal democracy in this sacred land. Besides these vitriolic problems, irresponsible rhetoric of politicians and lack of accountability further aggravate the matter.

The politics in Pakistan has been highly personal, vindictive and replete with lack of constructive political dialogue, and thus it stratifies the social structure of the society. The 'authority' has been used to aggrandize the fortunes and to settle the personal vendetta. The paranoid style to discredit the political opponents through conspiracies, confounding and manipulating others are some of the unique examples of its depressing political culture.

Pakistan has not learned any lessons from its democratic failures and thus not reaping the long-term benefits of

38 Hector Bolitho, *Jinnah: The Creator of Pakistan* (Karachi: IBS, 1954), 122-128

democratic success or democratic consolidation. The army is of view that public opinion is not supporting the takeovers. The public support for democracy has increased over the time. In spite of failures, there is a need to fill the democratic deficit created by inefficient political leaders. It is a truth that during the failures of democratic regimes, the army is viewed as the institution to pull the country from chaos and political morass.³⁹

The political situation after the military intervention, as a matter of fact, proves unhealthy from the viewpoint of constitutional rights of the people and the wider national interests. The military-civil divide, extreme polarization, absence of law, pervasiveness of injustice, undemocratic norms, pulverizing poverty, selective accountability, corrupt government machinery shams, spans and disillusion the will of people and their genuine demands. They although feel humiliated time and again yet they never lose their hopes and faith in the democratic norms as they knew that their real power, progress and ultimate destiny is solely pinned to the prospering democracy in the country. The power game between the army and political leadership has created many reservations regarding the legitimacy of political process and the functioning of the democracy in the country. Hence, there is a great need to acknowledge and realize the gap between the needs of the masses and performance of various governments in order to counter the socio-economic crisis and the breakdown of the governance and to mainstream the alienated backward regions and the unprivileged classes. However, many of the ThirdWorld countries in order to achieve these ideals introduced democracy but failed to achieve these goals. Pakistan is a classic example of that relationship with democracy.⁴⁰ Safdar Mahmood has asserted that democracy does not suit the

39 Madiah Afzal, "Pakistan's Democratic Opportunity," *Cairo Review* (2016): 80.

40 Daniel S. Markey, *No Exit from Pakistan: America's Tortured Relationship with Islamabad* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 45-48.

genius of Pakistani people⁴¹ whereas Javed Jabbar explains the same but in different milieu;

“Democracy often tests the patience of those who most admire it. The profundities of a representative form of government are frequently counter-pointed by the sheer inanities of populism. Pakistan’s current experience of its political system is only one facet of the sphinx-like character of democracy. Perhaps the trouble begins with the fact that while people do vote with utter sincerity they do not always vote with wisdom. Vulnerable to words and statements that stoke their fears and raise their hopes, people too easily fall prey to manipulative leaders.”⁴²

However, to the confidence of the people and the political parties must ensure a transparent but effective process of political emancipation, legal and social justice, economic advancement and social uplift through human resource development and proper allocation or appropriation of national resources. Only by ensuring this, the masses will be able to play an effective role in the country, in the region and in the world.

Conclusion

The current social and political scenario, which has been discussed in detail, demands a strong structure of political arrangements to tackle institutional imbalance and the problems of democratic system. The requisite political system must conform to political consensus to regulate the fragile civilian institutions and critical political issues in Pakistan. Democratic values and traditions can only thrive and nurture when a democratic culture is present in the system. As a matter of fact, the prevailing democracy in Pakistan is an opportunity to steer the state affairs with mutual consultation, which prevent the chances of taking undemocratic political decisions. It guarantees social,

41 Mahmood, *A Political Study of Pakistan*, 137-138.

42 Jabbar, *From Chaos to Catharsis*, 177.

economic and political stability with peace and prosperity in the state.

Based on the idea of popular sovereignty, democracy guarantees the liberty, fraternity and equality, and protects the fundamental rights of the people. Hence, for a stable Pakistan, we need a stable democracy. The real challenge is the growth of democracy in a feudal base environment, and real response is the reshaping of political culture that, in turn, will play an important role in shaping a democratic political dispensation in Pakistan.