



“Why democratic system is weak in Pakistan: Causes and Solutions”

Executive Summary – Pakistan has been in quest for stable democratic system from its very inception. The process of its democratization has been slow and passive. Its nature has remained fragile. It has been showing high vulnerability towards non democratic interventions. Besides, it has been easily falling prey to non civilian forces. As a result, Pakistan has been continuously failing to offer what a democracy promises. Such pathetic scenario has various reasons behind it at all three levels: State, government and society.

This Essay attempts to pin point and analyze the reasons behind such fragile and weak nature of democracy in Pakistan and extends recommendations along with identifying various means and players especially youth for strengthening democratic process in Pakistan to make it promising and delivering.

Introduction. – From very its start, Pakistan has choiced democratic form of government for itself. Its founders had ardently supported and emphasized for democratic system that could ideally permeate the governance structure and body politic of Pakistan; Quaid Azam Muhammd Ali Jinnah’s speech at the Staff College on June 14, 1948 is the witness of his staunch support for democracy as corresponding structure for the polity of Pakistan to make it people friendly and welfare state. However, it is an other fact that Quaid Azam Muhammd Ali Jinnah himself laid the foundation of non-democratic trends through centralizing structure of Muslim Leauge, dissolving non democratically Sindh Assembly and Ministry of Khan Sahab in NWFP in 1948 . Despite all this, what he choiced and dreamt for Pakistan about system is undoubtedly democracy. But unfortunately being constitutionally a democratic country, Pakistan entirely fails to offer what constitutional democracies offer viz, sovereign parliament, free, fair and regular elections, supremacy of constitution, independent Judiciary, rule of law, civilian control over the armed forces, political life free from military involvement, safety to minority rights, provision of basic human needs and guarantee of freedoms of movement, expression, association and assembly.

Contrary to dreams ,hopes and promises ,What Pakistan offers is the chequered history of democracy and unstable democratic process. Ironically, the country’s constitution has been abrogated twice (1958 and 1969) and suspended thrice (1977, 1999 and 2007) .More than half of its political life has been encroached by military generals. Five elected governments have been removed by army. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the founder of political vibrancy, mass based politics and giver of Atomic power to Pakistan was ruthlessly executed through judicial murder. Ex-prime ministers, and Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto were exiled.

Causes: Nothing exists without any reason in universe; creation of everything carries reason with itself. More ever, According to principle of “Cause and Effect” unless the root causes of any problem are not accurately identified and thoroughly diagnosed, problem can’t be solved on sustainable basis. Therefore, let’s find and discuss the causes behind such weak, vulnerable and dented face and status of democracy in Pakistan and try to reach at workable solutions.

Colonial Inheritances and Institutional Imbalance.

From time of its very creation, Pakistan has been experiencing institutional imbalance. Its roots go back to British period. Pakistan inherited administrative, political and legal legacies of British period .From political and administrative legacies point of view, Pakistan inherited high institutional imbalance characterized with strong and organized civil and military bureaucracies, weak¹ Political institutions and non-democratic political parties. As a result, it lacked strong, dynamic and sustainable political institutions which could hold regular elections based on universal franchise, could build trust of masses into democracy, could protect democratic process against constitutional transgression and could provide a conducive environment for democracy to flourish and could correspond to desires and aspirations of masses.

Muslim League which is credited to creation of Pakistan was a movement not a well-structured and deeply rooted political entity² that could offer post partition program, could counter the power of army and bureaucracy and could offer corresponding structure to desires and needs of masses after the partition. Besides, League was non democratic in its nature led by elitists³. Consequently, It could not produce first line as well second line leadership embedded with love for democratic norms and values in particular and overall democratic culture in general .

In this backdrop, administrative supremacy coupled with absence of elections based on universal franchise⁴ in particular and lack of democratic culture and process in general facilitated bureaucrats to rein the country from 1947 to 1958. Their periods is characterized with dummy and rubber stamped parliaments, abrupt and non democratic dissolutions of assemblies, political intrigues, bickering and quarrelling, inefficiency, abrupt and fast changes of regimes.

Frequent intervention of Non civilian forces into political domain.

Failure of bureaucratic regimes created space for army which was more organized than even civilian bureaucracies to intervene into political domain of country .formal involvement of army into civilian matters begun from marshalaw in Lahore in 1953 to control the riots between Ahmedis and Sunnies. Thereafter from 1958 army has ruled the country with short sighs, as short as of new born baby, of so called democratic regimes. Field Marshal law Ayoub Khan ruled the country from 1958 to 1969, General Yahya Khan from 1969 to 1971, General Ziaul Haq from 1977 to 1989, General Pervez Musharraf from 1999 to 2008⁵.

All four military regimes have remained characterized with impositions of Marshallaw, ban on political parties, censorship on media, dissolution of assemblies and abrogation or suspension of constitutions. Thus, they destroyed political institutions and frustrated the forces viz media, political parties that support and channelize consolidation of democracy.

Weak Party System.

One among the major forces which counter the military interventions into political domain and extra constitutional steps are genuine political parties with mass based support. But unfortunately Pakistan has been lacking strong and efficient party system which is very vital ingredient of Democracy. Democracy can neither exist nor can consolidate its process without strong, vibrant, vigilant and efficient political parties.

Political parties play indispensable role in strengthening democracy in various ways. Parties translate various values and aspects of democracy into reality; they work to institutionalize the diversity of opinions, the beauty of democracy; translate ideological strength of masses into organizational shape; work as channel to elect representatives; serve as mean whereby power is peacefully transformed; serve as platform to mobilize, sensitize and educate public and stand as bridge between public and government. In order to do all these tasks in letter and spirit, Political parties need to be systematically networked, deeply rooted into masses and internally democratic and operationally efficient, immune to internal divisions, sustaining worst times and outliving the death of its founder(s).

But, unfortunately Party system in Pakistan has remained very weak. Resultantly, it has created space for nonpolitical forces to emerge into political arena. It is proven fact that, apart from other reasons behind the overt and covert rule of dictators in Pakistan, absence of strong party system has remained one of the potent causes. Such non democratic orientation of political parties has weakened the culture of competition, bred nepotism and created incompetency which has obstructed the democratic process of parties' aswell country.

Non Democratic Social structure

The nature and structure of society translates itself into nature and structure of political institutions. Political institutions don't emerge in vaccum; they are expression of social institutions. Political and societal compositions interplay and influence each an other. That is why; it is said that democracy is not external but internal Phenomenon⁶. You cannot plant it like an artificial tree but can set up it through a particular process of democratization. Social structure of Pakistan is by and large feudal. From very its pre partition time , Two forces viz British rulers and Muslim Leuage, ironically who claimed and still claims champion of democracy ,have supported consolidation of feudal structure in the regions which constitute present Pakistan⁷.

Feudalism and democracy are two quite controversial norms: Feudalism is driven by principles of one person show, oppression, bondage, slavery. Whereas democracy is driven by principles of participation, peace, equality, pluralism and freedom. Owing to this, the nature of parliaments and political parties has remained non democratic in Pakistan. Pakistan has been remaining at the mercy of either these feudal politicians or military generals.

One among the reasons which has made India to emerge as democratic polity is that it has abolished feudalism from very its inception. But Muslim League perpetuated and consolidated this system because it was party of feudal itself where as Congress owing to its class question orientation has been anti feudalism.

Post partition history of Pakistan is marked with some initiatives taken for land reforms to loose the grip of feudalism. Ayyub then President and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto then prime introduced the reforms. But the reforms introduced by both were ineffective, secondary in their nature and devoid of genuine intent⁸.

Such feudal structure of society of Pakistan has been obstructing democratic process into various ways. It has translated non democratic trends into political culture. Secondly, it has impeded development of participatory culture. Thirdly, it has formed elitist orientations of politics. Fourthly, it has impeded Bourgeoisie middle class which is support mechanism to democracy .Lastly; it has been obstructing free and independent choice of public in elections which is basic and indispensable component of free elections.

Manipulation of election process.

Free and fair elections are major component of representative democracy. For democracy is, in one way, name of popular government which is not possible without free and fair process of election that guarantees genuine representation of masses in Parliament. Besides, Elections are the source of peaceful regime change. People resort to violent means of change if elections can't represent their aspirations, needs, and fails to offer them due and fair space. In this regard, Pakistan has dismal image to show. All the general elections except of 1971 and 2006 to some extent, have been manipulated in one or other way either at pre, during or post phase of the elections.

The manipulation has been worst demonstrated into form of political victimization, gerrymandering, stuffed ballot boxes, intimidation of polling staff ,pressurizing masses, use of state assets and violating rule of Election commission set for the election. Consequently, elections could not have been instrumental to determine the will of the people and have eroded trust of masses in democracy. If election could have proven to be instrumental in representing genuine will of people, the elected representatives must have elevated dignity of parliament, worked for strengthening of democracy and for welfare of masses whereby developing their trust in democracy.

Solutions/Recommendations.

The problem of democracy is solvable in Pakistan, if genuine steps are taken with cohesive and integrated approach. Let me extend few suggestions for strengthening democratic system, process and culture in Pakistan.

For state: • Feudalism should be immediately abolished to enable elections genuine instrumental of people's wishes; to create participatory culture; to develop democratic values and to transform social stagnancies into dynamism which all together help consolidation of democratic process.

• Judiciary should be made Independent so as to enable it to ensure implementation of rule of law; to undo and stop all legal and constitutional transgressions.

- Parliament should be made sovereign. A specific channel should be launched in parliament that air proceedings to make masses aware of what is going into it. It will make legislatures serious and responsible in their conduct and will push them to chalk out people friendly policies which in turn will make governance efficient and will build trust of masses in democracy. In this way, space and need of call to army to intervene in political domain will dwindle largely.
- Supremacy of constitution should be ensured. Article six⁹ should be practiced in letter and spirit to check all constitutional abrogation which has been by and large affecting democratic process in Pakistan.
- Free and fair election should be ensured through independent Election Commission in order to prevent the rigging.
- Democracy education should be incorporated in the syllabus at all levels of education to promote and create democratic values, norms and practices in youth in particular and in masses in general.
- Political party rules 2002 should be strictly implemented in order to help democratic structure and conduct of political parties.
- Funds should be allocated on the basis of membership to political parties in order to strengthen them to work effectively for democracy.

For Political parties:

- Political Parties should develop well defined people friendly ideology, expand their organizational network, perform structurally and operationally democratic, develop strong coordination between their lower and higher tiers , train their staff and impart democratic education to masse to give outlook of political entities which could generate the atmosphere of democracy within and outside of them, counter the supremacy of non political institutions ,Counter the constitutional transgression through public support mustered by restoring their trust in political parties.

For civil Society organizations.

Civil society organization should

- Impart democracy education to general masses, youth, political workers media persons and writers ;
- enhance capacity of political parties and other stake holders in order to make them vigilant, vibrant and responsive towards question and issue of democracy;
- impart liberal ,progressive and political education to masses in order to create political society to create conducive atmosphere for democracy;

- lobby with the lawmakers to pursue them to take concrete initiatives for consolidation of democracy such as incorporation of democracy education in syllabus, allocation of funds for political parties etc;
- launch advocacy programs to highlight non democratic trends and actions;
- launch capacity building programs for youth to inculcate love for politics and democracy into them

For youth.

Youth is the most significant part of any human society. They have played indispensable role in emancipation of human being. With fresh and hot blood, youth is always inclined towards activism, dynamism, change, and novelty. Populations of Pakistan constitute almost 35 percent of youth. Therefore, they also share the onus of enhancing democracy in Pakistan. Their indifferent attitude towards democracy in particular and towards politics in general will counter product rather produce constructively for consolidation of democracy. Therefore, youth of Pakistan should

- join political parties after academic education because what execute plans for democracy most effectively are political parties ;
- should raise the issue and question of democracy in print and electronic media;
- impart democracy education into their constituencies;
- register their votes and take active part in election process;
- join national and international youth organizations which work for democracy.

Conclusion.

Short analysis reveals that Pakistan has been badly experiencing chequered history of democracy. Weak political institutions, frequent military interventions, frequent dissolution of civilian governments, Engineered and flawed election process, weak party system, lack of constitutionalism and lack of rule of laws has been obstructing way for promotion of genuine democracy in Pakistan which would be characterized with sovereign parliament, free, fair and regular elections, supremacy of constitution, independent Judiciary, rule of law, civilian control over the armed forces, political life free from military involvement, safety to minority rights, provision of basic human needs and guarantee of freedom of movement, expression, association and assembly. In this backdrop, Onus lies on State institutions, political parties, civil society organizations and youth to play part of their role as enumerated in recommendations given above to create space for democracy to entrench itself firmly in Pakistan as it could be delivering and substantial.

References and Notes

. Von Bettina Robotka writes in “The Dilemma of Democracy in Pakistan “that “The weakness of the political institutions in Pakistan is – together with the pre-modern, feudal and tribal socio-economic structures – one of the major reasons for the weakness of Pakistani democracy”

2. Nasim Yousif writes in “Why democracy failed in Pakistan” That From the very beginning, the Muslim League lacked some Of the most fundamental tenets of a well-structured political organization: (i) a genuine Program for the welfare of the masses, (ii) members from the public, who elect local and National leaders at regularly held intra-party elections, and (iii) a grassroots following”

3. Nasim Yousif quotes in same article that “Barrister Aftab Iqbal (son of Allama Iqbal) would write, the League was controlled by “a few half educated, selfish and ambitious Nawabs and Muslim capitalists from Muslim minority provinces under the leadership of Mr.Jinnah... [who exploited] the ignorance and poverty of the Muslim masses” (The Tribune, Lahore, July 25, 1946)” “According to The Tribune of September 11, 1941, “Huq stated...[that the] principles of democracy and autonomy in the All-India Muslim League were being subordinated ‘to the arbitrary wishes of a single individual [Quaid-e-Azam].”

4. First general election based on Universal franchise was held in 1971 in Pakistan.

6. Feudal Ramos in an interview with News Week has beautifully said “To establish democratic institutions, democratically oriented people and overall culture of democracy and rule of law is very difficult if efforts are coming from outside. It is more enduringly established if it is coming from among the people.”

7. Ishtiaq Ahmed writes in Daily Times on 30 June 2002 that After the British had ruthlessly crushed the 1857 uprising, they established a more stable structure of landlordism by conferring property rights on those who remained loyal to them

8. Zulfiqar Shah writes in his article “Question of land reforms in Pakistan” published in Daily Dawn on 2 February 2008 That In January 1959, General Ayoub Khan’s government issued land reform regulations that aimed ‘to boost agricultural output, promote social justice, and ensure security of tenure.’ A ceiling of about 200 hectares of irrigated land and 400 hectares of non-irrigated land was placed on individual ownership; compensation was paid to owners for land surrendered. Numerous exemptions, including title transfers to family members, dampened the impact of the ceilings. Slightly fewer than one million hectares of land were surrendered, of which a little more than 250,000 hectares were sold to about 50,000 tenants. The land reforms failed to lessen the power or privileges of the landed elite.

In March 1972, the Z. A. Bhutto government announced further land reform measures, which went into effect in 1973. The landownership ceiling was lowered to about five hectares of irrigated land and about twelve hectares of non-irrigated land; exceptions were limited to an additional 20 per cent of land for owners having tractors and tube wells. The ceiling could also be extended for poor-quality land. The owners of confiscated land received no compensation, and beneficiaries were not charged for land distributed.

9. Article six of constitution of Pakistan reads as:

(1) Any person who abrogates or attempts or conspires to abrogate, subverts or attempts or conspires to subvert the Constitution by use of force or show of force or by other unconstitutional means shall be guilty of high treason.

(2) Any person aiding or abetting the acts mentioned in clause (1) shall likewise be guilty of high treason.

(3) [5] [Majlis-e-Shoora (Parliament)] shall by law provide for the punishment of persons found guilty of high treason

