

Democracy in Pakistan: Hopes and Hurdles

① Introduction:

Democracy in Pakistan has shown an eminent display of a hopeful regime despite the tumultuous track of history replete with various hurdles including multiple military coupes, coalition of political party for personal interests and weak role of election commission. However, it has been constant in depicting a hopeful vision attached to it through representation of public will, safeguarding liberty of individuals and upholding rule of law. Thus, adequate tackling of issues attached with democracy can propel it forward to achieve the hopeful narrative attached to it.

② Democratic regime in Pakistan.

③ Hopes attached with democracy in Pakistan:

- ① Representation of public opinion.
- ② Safeguarding liberty of individuals.
- ③ Establishment of fair and legal system to reduce corruption.

- (d) Establishment of stable and peaceful political environment,
- (e) Establishment of system of check and balances preventing concentration of power in one branch of government.
- (f) Protection of rights of minority
- (g) Empowerment of women and other marginalised groups.

④ Hurdles faced by Pakistan in regards of democracy:

(a) Social problems linked with democracy:

- (i) Illiteracy resulting in reduced awareness regarding political rights.
- (ii) Decreased in equal representation of women.
- (iii) Irresponsible and biased media campaigns.

(b) Political hurdles linked with democracy:

- (i) Coalition of political parties for personal interest.
- (ii) Weak role of election commission.

(c) Administrative hurdles linked with democracy:

- (i) Multiple military coups

(ii) Deteriorating economic growth

⑤ Position of democracy in today's Pakistan.

⑥ Recommendations for strengthening democracy in Pakistan.

⑦ Conclusion.

Democracy is considered to be one of the founding pillars of governance, where the will of public is conveyed through the elected representatives. This situation is pertinent to Pakistan since inception, where its basic ideology is based upon democracy. During the course of time it has faced certain situations that has derailed democracy from its true path and tried to sabotage the meaning. Democracy in Pakistan has shown an eminent display of a hopeful regime despite the tumultuous track of history repleted with various hurdles including multiple military coupes, coalition of political party for personal interests and weak role of election commission. However, it has been constant in depicting a hopeful vision attached to it through representation of public will, safeguarding liberty of individuals and upholding the rule of law. Thus, adequate tackling of issues attached with democracy can propel it forward to achieve the hopeful narrative attached to it.

Democratic regime is prominently illustrated through Pakistan's history, where it has struggled from the very start to enshrine the opinions of the general mass. Convulsed through different eras, during the initial years, Pakistan fought with resistance in

constitution making that was a hindrance in smooth running of country's apparatus.

Right after the promulgation of first constitution, it was over turned and a military take over was seen. With passage of time, it became a difficult and hegemonic task to conduct free and fair elections.

Multiple options were put forward as an experiment to shape the democratic conduct of state that included Basic Democracy system till Legal Framework Order, which instigated the conduction of election in country. Smooth transition of authority from one ruling party to another in 2013 was marked as a historic achievement in democratic struggle of the country and pinned a hope for accelerating the democratization process in the country.

Various hopeful prospects attached with democracy in Pakistan, paves way for the basic values to be instilled in society. This includes representation of public opinion. Providing a platform for the projection of views and demands of public mass is one of the basic needs of society to be fulfilled by the governance. Representative government provides an opportunity for the public to place their trust in elected officials to appropriately legislate according to their needs.

The process of general elections in the country ensures the participation of public in electing the electoral college and indirectly choosing head of the state. Hence, democracy displays an affirmative view regarding the general will of society becoming a part of government.

Another hopeful prospective linked with democracy in Pakistan is safeguarding the liberty of individuals. Democracy is synonymous to rule by the people and ensures the presence of political liberty, that enables people to actively participate in state's affairs. In this way democracy vests power in people and facilitate them to act against monopoly of the state in case of despotic rule. Multiple aspects of liberty are ensured through freedom of speech, constitution entailing rights of common mass and independent judiciary protecting the freedom of an individual. Pakistan provides this opportunity with compliance towards civil rights movement. Balochistan Rights Movement is directed to gather attention for the extrajudicial killing, disappearance of individuals and mobilising the support for Balochis. In providing support to civil society movements, Pakistan strengthens the

voice of an individual and safeguards the liberty of an individual.

An affirmative and prosperous landscape of Pakistan is portrayed by democracy, through establishment of fair and legal system to reduce corruption. This act of check and balance is facilitated by the presence of independent judiciary, which ensures the running of state's institutions according to rules and regulations. In context of Pakistan, a controversial law ~~granting~~ granting amnesty to corrupt politicians and officials was passed, named as National Reconciliation Ordinance. Nevertheless, it was struck down by Supreme Court on the basis of violating principle of accountability. This act of judiciary not only negated the justification of an ~~illegal~~ illegal act but also restricted the growth of corruption. Hence, through the essence of democracy, the empowered judiciary establishes a legal system.

Values of democracy can only be flourished in an environment which is stable and peaceful in regards to political aspect. Smooth transition of power from one political party to another ensures prevalence of harmony in society with inclusion of consent of

public. In Pakistan's view, it faced destabilisation multiple times since independence. This situation gave an impetus to politicians to sign Charter of Democracy, which provided strength for democratic values to prevail. In coming years, unobstructed change of government was hailed successful in creating a political environment of acceptance in society. This was only possible with attention given towards government by majority.

Appropriate distribution of power among the organs of government is one of the assuring factors of democracy. It makes sure that there is a system of check and balance to strike down the concentration of power in any one branch of ruling body. The flag bearer of this aspect is independence of judiciary. Autonomy of judiciary ensures various functions such as laws passed in accordance to constitution, curbing the rising power of any one branch of ruling authority and protecting the rights of citizens. Some responsibilities are carried out by judiciary in Pakistan and are evident through multiple cases in past. One of ^{the} incident in initial years after independence of Pakistan was of Governor general Ghulam Muhammad, where

Federal court declared the dissolution of Assembly by Governor general as illegal, thereby preventing the usurping of power by an individual or one branch of government.

Democracy is based upon the equal representation of society, therefore it guarantees equal participation of minority in state's affair. In Pakistan, minorities are given voice through allocation of seats in National Assembly and reducing any hurdle involved in curbing minorities from their inalienable rights. One such example is passing of law, Hindu Marriage Act in 2017, with support from both ruling and opposition party. It guarantees the rights of Hindu and portrays a ray of hope for inter-faith harmony to prevail in Pakistan.

Representative government demands equal rights and equal participation of women, not only in electing the legislature, but also in becoming part of running state's affairs. This element of equal representation ensures that laws ^{are passed} in accordance to needs of women and marginalised communities. There are around sixty number of seats reserved for women in National Assembly.

of Pakistan. To reiterate the presence of women in political sphere, it is now mandatory for political parties to allocate at least ten percent of seats for women. This encourages nomination of more than one woman as candidate and mobilises their inclusion in political process. Hence, fortifying the foundation of democracy with engagement of people from all spheres of life.

With multiple avenues of hope, providing strength for democracy to thrive in Pakistan, there are also numerous hurdles and resistance faced by democracy. One of the main obstacles impeding the path of democracy includes social problems. Participatory democracy demands awareness of public mass and educated audience that is able to select an appropriate leader for their country. Not only their rational in selection of leader will be enhanced, but also they will be more aware regarding political rights. In contrary to this, the bleak picture of today presents a very low rate of literacy. Illiteracy will not only restrain an individual in other spheres of life, but also hinders his path of gaining awareness regarding political rights. This same issue compelled one of the former

Leaders of Pakistan, General Ayub Khan to adopt Basic Democracy system that paved way for public to politically mature through indirect elections. However, this system also exhibited paternalistic values attached to it and hence, decreased the participation of an individual in political process.

Although there are several measures taken to enhance the representation of women in politics, still the number remains meagre. Main reason for decrease in equal representation of women in political arena is socio-cultural barrier. This socio-cultural barrier comprises of numerous factors including hostile working environment, which discourages a woman to come forward. Another impeding factor includes woman being unequipped with knowledge regarding their rights. Hence, this barrier curtails the participation of women in politics.

Another main obstruction in path of democracy is irresponsible and biased media campaigns. Media always acts as a tool for guiding public through various events. It equips an individual for appropriately discriminating between right and wrong. Conversely, biased media

erects a deceiving facade while deteriorating their logical coherence. Similarly, in Pakistan numerous campaigns regarding political affairs are spilled over various social media platforms. This diverts the attention of public from the actual issue and weakens their participation in democratic process.

In addition, to the social problems pinned as hurdles in path of democracy, there are numerous political hurdles as well. One of the ^{main} political obstruction includes coalition of political parties for personal interests. Political parties constitute as one of the main constituents of political apparatus of country. Integration of parties for their own vested interest has marred the democratic regime of Pakistan. In recent example, Pakistan Democratic Movement formed in 2020 acted as one of the destabilising factor in statesmanship. Hence, culmination of parties for their own interest acts as a hegemonic opposition against the success of democracy.

Similarly, weak role of election commission deteriorates the fragile political fabric of Pakistan. Election Commission of Pakistan was made independent through

the passage of 18th amendment. Despite gaining an autonomous stature, appointment of officials in Election Commission has been criticised on basis of lacking transparency and accountability. Along with this, there has been criticism regarding transparent conduct of elections by Election Commission of Pakistan. General elections of 2013 were heavily criticised as the final results were implicated in rigging.

Among the numerous hurdles connected with democracy, administration also presents a challenge. Pakistan's history is chequered with multiple military interventions. The wheels of military coup had churned frequently in past, resulting in stagnation of democratic progress. A lacuna was present, in initial years, due to absence of rigid constitution providing a path for military to take over the stage.

As dictatorship is antithesis to democracy, it has always left a mark of tyranny. Hence, multiple military coups had suppressed the voice of people through stifling of democracy.

Another administrative factor ~~in~~ impeding the progress of democracy is the ongoing deteriorating economic

growth of country. One practical example is the country's ~~economic~~ ongoing economic challenges including debt crisis and high inflation. These challenges paves way for political instability and other repercussions such as delay in conduction of election. Crippling economy results in decreased revenue. Subsequently, posing an ~~obstacle~~ obstacle through rise in public support for authoritarian leaders promising to fulfill the unmet demands.

In view of all the hopes and hurdles faced by democracy in today's time, representative government in Pakistan presents a paradoxical picture. Stagnation in democracy ^{is} due to delay in elections, frequent use of ~~vote~~ vote of no confidence and rise in populist campaigns. Despite the bleak picture displayed by the majoritarian rule, it still holds great value in society due to its ability to include the public opinion. Recent political campaigns displayed across the country ^{via} social media, has equipped a common man to raise voice against electoral autocracy. Hence, the ongoing political instability compels an individual to actively participate in political affair.

To strengthen democracy in Pakistan, it requires involvement of both state and individual. At state level various reforms needs to be taken into account including raising awareness regarding political rights to create mass mobilisation, providing an amiable environment for women's participation and enhancing the transparency of elections. It can also restrict the coalition of parties at the risk of weakening democracy, while ensuring equal division of power among various organs of government.

An individual can also act as a responsible citizen of the state through active participation in elections and casting vote according to his own rationale despite various ongoing propagandas. At personal level, one has to break the social and cultural barrier in today's society to accelerate the infiltration of women in politics. This can be aptly done through acquiring of education while distilling the society from shackles of orthodox views.

In crux, democracy stands at a very critical juncture ~~is~~ presently, displaying a semblance of order while navigating through crucial times. Retrospective view of democracy is saturated with heavy resistance faced by it. Despite

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facing various obstructions and hurdles, democracy still shines a hope for ^{the} coming times. The true essence of democracy providing public not to be ruled by majority only, but also to be part of governance entails the most basic characteristic. This attribute provides an optimistic picture for Pakistan to strengthen its regime according to will of citizens, while pushing the country to propell towards success with help of democracy.