

Discuss the role of regional and nationalist political parties in Pakistani politics. How far are these parties necessary for the political system?

① Introduction

Societies are never homogeneous in their views and ideologies. The difference in their views, opinions and preferences form the foundation of different political parties. According to Maclver, "The party system in particular was the mechanism by which the class state was transformed into the nation-state party attains fruition in democracy and democracy finds completion through party system". The role of political parties in Pakistani politics has never been satisfactory. These parties have always preferred party interests over national interests and lacked clear agendas. They proved to be a factor of divide among masses. Political parties are a part of society and mirror its realities. There are no such shortcuts to improving their quality beyond a slow gradual change in society. These parties can play an important role if they reform their working agendas and work together for the greater cause of national development and integration.

② National and Regional Parties in Pakistan

There is a very narrow line of distinction between the two parties. Both regional and national parties are equally important and

both types of parties have played their role in the history of Pakistan.

Those political parties which exercise influence all over the country are termed as national political parties like Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PMLN), Pakistan People Party (PPP), and Pakistan Tehreek e Inqaf (PTI). National parties don't necessarily enjoy equal status in all the provinces of the country. They may be strong in one province and weak in other provinces. For example, PPP has strong political base in Sindh and PMLN is strong in Punjab.

Regional parties, on the other hand, focus on regional interests. These parties are equally strong and often rely on their support in the electoral process and later government formation due to their rigid vote bank. For example Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) is a regional political party in the urban areas of Sindh.

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Role of National and Regional Parties in Pakistani Politics

The role of national and ^{regional} political parties in Pakistani politics is quite disappointing. Here are some points to back up this claim.

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① Preferring Party Interests over National Interests

Most of the regional and national political parties align themselves with different quasi-democratic or military regimes

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to get favors in different matters. This is because political parties prefer party interests over national interests.

(b) Non Synchronization of Opinions of Political Elite over Military Supremacy

Due to lack of strong political parties the military often interferes in the government affairs. Pakistan has been ruled by the military for about four decades in the past 75 years. Most of the political dealings have been regional, fictional and one-sided which was against the political standards of any political system, thwarting the political culture of Pakistan. Despite the military attempt at civilian politics, all coups in Pakistan have had initial backing from a section of political forces. The political forces of Pakistan legitimized any incoming military rule through their political support just to fulfill their temporary interests. This state of affairs is present even today in the country as the military openly affects matters of government.

Weak civilian leadership or representation on the part of parliament pulled the military into the politics of Pakistan. The weak social structure along with poor economic conditions led to the military intervention. (Maleeha Lodhi).

(c) Lack of Manifestos or Ideologies to Attract Masses

Political parties of Pakistan lack any clear agenda or manifesto to attract the masses.

"The system of political parties in Pakistan bears little resemblance to that of most other democratic countries. Politics has begun at the top-- politics is made up of a large number of leading persons who, with their political dependents, from loose agreements to achieve power and to maintain it" (Keith B. Callard).

(d) Political Parties as a Factor of Divide

For example, Awami League won elections in 1970 but this party represented only Bengali interests and led to the disintegration of Pakistan in December 1971.

(e) Lack of Competent Leadership in Political Parties

Most of the regional political parties lack competent leadership and therefore are unable to play a positive role in the development of the country.

(f) Corruption and Nepotism Political Parties

Unfortunately, corruption and nepotism are common in Pakistani politics which hinder the way towards a true democracy. Most of the party leaders in key political parties

are selected based on their surnames rather than their competence.

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Importance of Regional and Nationalist Parties to the Political System

Importance of political parties in modern constitutional state cannot be overemphasized, the working of entire governmental machinery depends upon them. The fact of the matter is that political democracy cannot be conceived without political parties. They are a motive force behind all state activity. Political parties secure harmony of action among the various organs of the government. Some merits of political parties are discussed below.

① Formation of Public Opinion

Political parties formulate public opinion. In democracy, every adult enjoys the right to vote. Every citizen is to express his or her opinion at the time of election. They place clear alternatives before the people. Citizens rally round different political parties and public opinion is thus organized into definite channels. Political parties in this way provide an effective means for an organised and expression of views on vital question of public policy. As Godley says, "In democracies they furnish organisation through which policies are formulated and political propaganda is carried on for the purpose of creating and influencing public opinion."

(b) Education

The political parties educate public opinion through their propaganda. They publish newspapers, magazines, journals and other printed literature for popularising their programmes and politics. Moreover, they have a host of speakers who explain and defend their party programmes through press and platform. It is thus by means of press and platform that political parties impart education to the people. Lowell says that political parties serve as the "broker of ideas". The political discussion by parties enables the voter to find the truth for himself. They raise issues, present facts, analyse them and present alternative solutions. The voter is gripped with the issues and can choose the solution that he considers best.

(c) Public Spiritedness

Political parties arouse popular interest in public affairs. It is due to the propaganda of political parties that every party system person in modern democratic times appears to be attached to the public life of his or her country.

(d) Link between the Government and the people

The political party belonging to the majority group in the legislature serves to maintain a link between the government and the people. It rank and file explain and

popularise the policies, pursued by the government
The political organisation maintains a continuous connection between the elected representatives and thus makes government really representative. There is a greater harmony between the people and the government.

(e) **Coordination in Different Organs**

The political party belonging to the majority group in the legislature serves to maintain a link between the government and the people. Political parties serve to bring about a sought of coordination in the working of different organs of the government. They have played this role in the USA where the government is based on the principle of "separation of powers". They act as a unifying force. It makes for a continuous policy and continuity in administration. The executive and legislative co-operate and operate a unified policy.

(f) **Political Parties Create Unity in the Nation**

Every party has to formulate programme that can appeal to all the voters, at least to a majority. The class differences, therefore, get reconciled.
It is because of political parties that the state has become a national state. Even when the conservative party rules in Britain it has to formulate its policies that

can serve the national interests and promotes interests of working class actively supported by its opponents, the Labour Party.

(g) **Safeguards National Interests**

Political parties safeguard national interests. For example, the All India Muslim League struggled for the independence and rights of Muslims of the sub-continent.

(h) **Better decision Making**

A multi-party system is good for better decision making. Different parties represent different ideologies and the disarray of ideas and opinions is the beauty of democracy.

(i) **Solution for Regional Issues**

Political parties stand for regional or ethnic issues which are a source of resentment and deprivation in the region.

(j) **Can Bring Reforms**

Political parties are a tool to bring reform and put governments into action and set them to function for the betterment of the people.

(k) **Necessary for Functioning Democracy**

Political parties make democracy a success. Parliamentary democracy cannot run without the help of two parties - the party in power and the party in opposition. The majority party forms the government and the minority party forms the opposition. The opposition criticizes the policy of the government and thereby exposes the weakness.

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inefficiency and drawbacks of the government. It seeks to defeat the party in power and try to step into its shoes by winning over a majority in support of its policy.

⑤ Conclusion

In a nutshell, the role of regional and national political parties has been important in the history of Pakistan and are necessary for the better functioning of the democracy and the economic development of the country in the future as well, provided they follow the decent principles of argumentation and opposition.