

THE ROLE OF POLITICAL PARTIES AND DEMOCRATIZATION IN PAKISTAN

*Jamshed Ali Baloch
Asghar Baber
Humera Hakro*

ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to examine the factors for under performance of political parties in Pakistan. Political parties are important for democratic process in a country. Ironically, political parties in Pakistan could not play the cardinal role in enhancing democratic process. Eccentric attitude of political parties towards intractable issues faced by common people of Pakistan, whimsical approached civil and military governments and lack of charismatic leadership are cogent factors of derailment of democracy in Pakistan. Owing to the fact political parties have lost popularity among masses. The scenario has given birth to dilemma of coalition governments in the state that has proved inimical to democracy. If political parties do not bring pragmatic reforms in their structure, the future of democracy will remain at stake in Pakistan.

Keywords: Democratization, military, political parties

INTRODUCTION

Since Pakistan was born an elite state it was natural for the political elites to behave irresponsibly and for the state to turn in to rein tire one. While the political and military elites keep taking turns at running the country, the lives of ordinary people remain unaffected by the change of faces. Pakistan has only seen authoritarian system of government. Political parties in Pakistan have also governed the country in an arbitrary manner and therefore democracy, as practiced in Pakistan, has never offered stark contrast to the military dictatorship. Politics in Pakistan is facing three prone issues regarding political parties. First, political parties are weak in their internal structure. Second, the political scenarios in which political parties grow since independence does not prove conducive for the political parties due to long military rule. Third political leadership since the very beginning of the

country either assassinated or removed by military coups. Taking into account internal structure of the political parties of Pakistan there are facets of cogent factors that always hampered the growth of democratic principles in Pakistan. "Some political parties are vehicle of powerful personalities, especial interests or region of a country; others are ideological in their orientation. Then there are aggregative parties that attempt to unite a diverse range of class, economic, ideological and geographical interests for the purpose of attaining political power. Pakistan has seen the rise and often the fall of each kind of party (Cohen, 2006).

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Failure of parliamentary democracy in Pakistan has been attributed by various scholars to lack of well-organized political parties, personal rivalries among politicians, delaying in the constitution making mass illiteracy and clash of parochial interests. Pakistan and India shares some similarities in political culture, but there is question of great scrutiny that, why political parties are so strong in India who substantiate democratic process, but political parties are failed to consolidate democratic process in Pakistan? By overhauling the historic political culture one can get radical conclusion for the retrospect of both the India and Pakistan. Comparative study of political cultures of India and Pakistan indicate some invincible facts about why India stabilized its democratic system and Pakistan fail to bring around democratic process. The major factor Indian success is: First Indian political leadership successfully established their constitution after very inception of the country. While Pakistan failed to establish its first constitution. Second Indian civilian leadership introduced land reforms to mitigate the influence of the feudalism. On the other hand in Pakistan all the civilian and military governments fail to do so. The civilian governments in India control their military institution through civilian bureaucracy; while in Pakistan the case is other way round. According to B.R.Ambedkar, India greatly benefited from the partition. India was able to get lion's share in resources, while Pakistan was unable to secure its due share.

There are other facts of great importance First; India established the history of well-organized political party system. It is true that mostly one party (congress) and one family (Nehru

family) has been ruling India but it must be conceded to the credit of both that they have done so through the democratic means. If Jawaharlal Nehru strengthens the congress, he did it through the known political methods and if congress, has reigned uninterrupted rule it did it through the democratic means. The Indian National Congress party had so many elected leaders to support democracy, the Muslim league as a whole had only two leaders of caliber of democratic order. Ultimately the death of these leaders left spillover implications on the party only Mohammad Ali Jinnah could have provided democratic norms and ideological vision that the followers of the leader could apply his mission.

Secondly, Muslim league got setback when it lost Quaid-i-Azam. But when Nehru was removed from political scene; it was the party organization which sustained the momentum through various upheavals. Muslim league stood for the creation of Pakistan and directed all its efforts to achieve this object. It did not indicate the outlines of the political and economic programmes to be implemented after independence. Its leaders merely claimed that the Muslims of British India wished to establish an state in which they might live their lives in accordance with teachings of the Quran and the traditions of the Holy Prophet and projected to the world that only Islam can solve their fundamental problems in the prevalent scenario of the world. "The most significant difference why failed to institutionalized democracy in Pakistan and Congress successfully did so was their different in character and attitude of these two parties, their social status and way of their interaction with their respective nations they were trying to establish" (Inayat, 1998).

THE ROLE OF MUSLIM LEAGUE

The opposition plays vital role for the success story of liberal democratic system. The positive criticism can enhance the democratic norms in a society. Ironically, in Pakistan opposition parties were deliberately discouraged; the opposition to the Muslim league was contemplated as opposition to Pakistan. The league fought for three way battles for achieving Pakistan against Indian national congress, against the Muslim parties that apposed Pakistan and simultaneously pressured British to concede it as only Muslim representative party. By the times league's struggle succeed it had

developed political culture characterized by its exclusive claim to patriotism and governed Pakistan and showed deep antagonism towards other political parties. This political culture of Muslim League got so deeply engrained in Pakistan's politics and defused among all parties.

After the early demise of Quid-e-Azam and assassination of Liaquat Ali Khan created leadership crisis. The situation provided opportunity for military and bureaucracy to manipulate the Muslim league for their own advantages. After the creation of Pakistan the league was unwilling to lay the foundation of multi-party system and to recognize the legitimacy of opposition necessary for the functioning of parliamentary democracy. "Today's Pakistan Muslim League (PML) is a different organization than the Muslim league that was founded in 1906 as the All Indian Muslim league. The original Muslim league never had deep roots in the provinces that eventually made Pakistan; it was an elite party with undemocratic structure. When Muhammad Ali Jinnah died and his chief lieutenant Liaquat Ali Khan assassinated, the party was deprived of experienced leaders who might have managed the transition from political movement to political party (Cohen, 2006).

The league leadership persuaded the pre-partition political parties to join it rather than maintain their identity and function in democratic system as legitimate opposition.

WEAKNESSES OF POLITICAL PARTIES

"In Pakistan democracy has not taken root because whenever an effort was made to introduce it, it was grafted onto an egalitarian power structure. The components of this powerful structure have no material interests and ideological commitment to establishing democracy" (Inayat, 1998). Political parties of Pakistan have weakness in their internal structures. Pakistan possesses multi-party system. Political parties of Pakistan are national, ethnic, religious and liberal in their outlooks. These parties are facing issues of leadership, internal party elections lack of political education of their workers and lack of democratic principles to participate in general elections. Only few parties possess internal democratic process of elections like Jamat-e-Islami and Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM). It is irony of the

fact that these parties especially religious parties have less majority of votes because first their extremist ideological vision and lack of commitment of their leadership towards intractable issues relating to common people. "Most political parties in Pakistan are amorphous groups attached to individual leaders lacking stable membership are ill-informed about party programmes. Except some ideological parties with committed cadre, others lack stable organizational structure (Inayat, 1998).

Major parties like Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and Muslim League Nawaz are becoming hereditary in their characters hereditary their succession undermines strength of political parties as amorphous institutions. Parties need to introduce to themselves to concept of succession planning and grooming leaders for the future. Pakistan needs constitutional amendments that bars individual from holding the chief executive of the country for more than two terms. Political parties rarely hold elections in their internal cadre which is essence of democratic process political parties avoided election some hold it periodically, often adopting dubious methods.

"The most important factor that determined the course of development of political parties in Pakistan was the imbalance between the power of the political parties and that of the state institutions and the attitude of the later towards the former" (Inayat, 1998).

If and when party election held these bring out latent intra-party tensions and conflicts. Weakness of political parties, the fragmentation into small and effective factions their organization are main factors for under performance of political parties. The leaders of these political parties are unable to make themselves autonomous organizations they remained dependent on their leaders for their survival for gaining power. The role of opposition is very important for the successful liberal democratic institutions. Its constructive criticism can promote democratic values in societies.

Military Intervention and Political Parties

One of the reasons for the prolonged military control relates to the weakness of the political parties. Pakistan's checkered political history unleashed the fact that military ruled country more

than half of its existence. “The civilian and military bureaucracy felt that there was need to unite the newly formed nation and lead it forwards economic progress. Moreover, war with India over Kashmir in 1948 only strengthened the hand and resolve of the civilian and military bureaucracies in claiming the control of power in Pakistan (K. B. Sayeed, 1980).

While in power: military governments adopted three prong strategies. First, they centralized the power. Secondly, it banned political parties from contesting elections. Thirdly, it introduced district government or devolution of power to their handmade district for two reasons to consolidate their political power to subvert the political forces from the active politics. The weakness of Pakistan’s political institution operates three levels. First, the country encompasses remarkable ethnic diversity from the beginning. Pakistan has had difficulty in finding the right balance between national coherence/unity and rights and identities of minority ethnic groups in its national life. Secondly, the political institutions on which a functioning democracy depends have had to contain not only with the usual problems of poverty and security but also with the substantial political role of army. Thirdly, the administrative organs of state have been weakened crippled by the decades of institutional decay. Military introduced rigorous measures to ban the political parties and their leaders. “Historic developments resulting in the military emerged as the most powerful and dominant institution of the state and in the nexus of power in Pakistan, even the possibility of having a working formal democracy, without the intervention and manipulation by the military, seems improbable. At the best Pakistan’s democratic form will be “praetorian democracy”, which will continue to be controlled, ruled and determined by the military, its institutions and their interests” (S. Akbar Zaidi, 2013).

During first Martial Law Ayub Khan introduced basic democracy system. President Zia-ul-Haq arranged non-party election and formed government headed by Mohammad Khan Junejo. These military leaders weakened the power and authority of political parties. Ayub Khan used Public Office Disqualification Order (PODO) and Elective Bodies Disqualification Order (EBDO) to control over political system. Zia also destroyed political parties. President Pervez Musharraf introduced Legal

Framework Order (LFO) where political parties were banned to participate in elections. Another tool which military used against the political parties was the decentralization of power to the district level governments rather than transformation of power to the provinces. General Ayub introduced basic democrats, General Zia-ul-Haq introduced district governments and Pervez Musharraf coined devolution of plan to sideline major political parties. The Muslim league was always used as a king's party to protect political participation of military in Pakistan. Military governments in order to fulfill their vested interests and to prolong their arbitrary rule initiated factions or parties with ethnic basis to counter chief political parties. MQM was empowered to entangle PPP in Sindh.

NEW TRENDS IN POLITICS

The Musharraf era provided common grounds for two major political parties to consolidate political forces against dictator. Leaders from both Pakistan People's Party and Muslim League Nawaz came to terms by signing a historic document called "charter of democracy". The charter seems to be ineffective document that could protect democratic process in Pakistan. The people's party and PML-N got engaged in the politics of confrontation on the issue of restoration of judges after assuming power in 2008 elections. There emerged new trends into the political scenario of Pakistan in last decade that one is the active interference of friendly countries as Saudi Arabia, UAE, US and Great Britain for the restoration of democratic process in Pakistan.

The explicit example is the return of Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto to Pakistan after long exile. Second, the new trend exists into the politics of Pakistan is NRO (National Reconciliation Ordinance) the turned that have been emerged in recent years into the politics of Pakistan seems to have negative implications on the future course of Pakistan. Desperately for greater power politicians have began to behave in the manner in which they did in the past, which means weakening political institutions and strengthening military. In the last three decades, the politics of building group interests has replaced the politics of mass mobilization; mass agitation in Pakistan. This is best reflected in voting behavior, political apathy and the decline of the party worker.

CONCLUSION

The brief analysis on the political parties' role for the enhancement of democracy in Pakistan suggests radical results. First, political parties since the very inception of Pakistan remained fragile and rarely protected democratic principles in country. Second, long military rules and dominancy of feudal elites on the politics in Pakistan, has always strengthened "authoritarian rule" rather than electoral democracy. Thirdly, lack of visionary leadership has been the fate of Pakistan which has left spillover impacts in the shape of perpetual military rules. The politics of Pakistan imbibed new but less effective trends for the future course of democracy. The politics of national reconciliation proved abortive: it is rather a tool that consolidated authoritarian rule in Pakistan. Pakistan needs consensus based political culture. The role of political parties in this regard will be crucial: if political parties adopt democratic principles in their intra-party elections to abandoned hereditary process of electing their leaders. There is a desperate need to bring about constitutional reforms regarding participation of political parties in national elections. Until and unless common people are given chance to participate in the electoral process; democratic enhancement will be a distant dream in Pakistan.

REFERENCES

Stephen, Cohen, *The Idea of Pakistan*. (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2004).

Ambedkar, B.R., *Pakistan or the Partition of India*. (Bombay: Thackers Publishers, 1946).

Inayat, *State and Democracy in Pakistan*. (Lahore: Vanguard Book, 1998).

K. B. Sayeed, *Politics in Pakistan: The Nature and Direction of Change*. (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1980).

S. Akbar Zaidi, *Military Civil Society and Democratization in Pakistan*. (Lahore: Vanguard Book, 2013).

Saeed Shafqat, *New Perspectives on Pakistan Vision For the Future*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).