

Concept of democracy: Its origin

Feudalism
Democracy
F-9951
20.13.05

Mohammad Jamil

The concept of democracy dates back to 2500 B.C. in Greek city-states, most probably even before that. It was, however, different from the one in modern nation states where it owed its origin to the Industrial Revolution and emergence of capitalism. In seventeenth century England, the trading community forged unity in their ranks to wage a struggle against the absolute powers of the king, feudalism and influence of the clergy. Since the country was ready for change for a new order, it gave birth to the Industrial Revolution. Historical evidence suggests that concept of western democracy emerged with Industrial Revolution and capitalism; and often acquired 'social democratic' element as universal suffrage appeared on the horizon.

The masses were thus given tangible benefits in terms of social welfare and income redistribution in return. On the other hand, democracy in the Third World countries is emerging at a time when the neo-liberalism advocated by the West is in ascendancy, and state intervention is deemed ideologically unsound. It goes without saying the periods of history when values undergo a fundamental shift are certainly not unprecedented. And a new system of economics and concomitant system of governance was always born on the ruins of the obsolete system.

John Locke had already propounded the theory of basic rights of life, property and freedom; but Voltaire and Rousseau were the two voices of a vast process of economic and political transition from feudal aristocracy to the rule of the middle class.

Rising bourgeoisie supported the rationalism of Voltaire and naturalism of Rousseau, as they were to assume the leadership due to the void created by the barons and clergy. In Europe when trade and commerce flourished, the contradictions developed between the emerging class of traders and feudal lords. In England, the emerging mercantilist class exerted immense pressure on the government and then only the powers were transferred from the House of Lords to the House of Commons.

Cromwell had earlier believed in the divine right of the kings but on realizing the

imperatives of the era finally sided with commercial and industrial class. However, when the feudal structure decayed and capitalism emerged, bourgeoisie took over from feudalism and the Church, and tried to mould the character of man, his thought and his environment. It took control of science, literature and even morals. No doubt, liberalism, democracy and rejection of obscurantism were considered laudable objectives but man lost the fundamental dimensions of nature: love, humanism and idealism, and became menacing beast. The predicament called for an ideological reassessment of the moral decline and search for new vistas leading to enlightenment.

Exactly one year before of October 1958 Martial Law in Pakistan, Professor Keith Callard in his political study of 'Pakistan' had observed, "If representative government collapses, it will be because legs

manner and state apparatus falls victim to personal whims of the ruling elite, the people start pinning hopes on anyone who promises to emancipate them from economic misery and repression.

Knowing that Pakistan is a semi-feudal semi-capitalist society, our intellectuals and democrats still wish to bypass the historical process to see genuine democracy. Pakistan's left had in the past dreamt of a revolution, as they felt that contradictions, iniquitous system and immense poverty were the conditions conducive to socialist revolution. As a matter of fact, there is more to it. In his "Autonomy of Revolution" Crane Brinton describes some 'tentative uniformities' that he discovered in the Puritan, American, French and Russian revolutions. The uniformities were: an economically advancing society, class antagonism, desertion of intellectuals, inefficient government, a ruling class that has

and tranquility in their societies. At present a majority of the ruling political parties of EU are either social democrats or were committed to welfare of the masses but in essence they stand for deregulation, liberal and free economies. International institutions such as the IMF and World Bank have been exerting pressure on the developing countries including Pakistan to balance their budgets. The governments are inclined to increase indirect taxes, or reduce allocations for social sector; in either case the masses suffer.

In Pakistan, the feudalism does not exist in its classical form but feudal mindset reigns supreme. Of course, some industrialization did take place but, overwhelmingly, Pakistan remained a feudal society, as jagirdars, vaderas and sardars wield enormous powers. They enjoy political clout and in cahoots with nouveau riche industrial class and bureaucracy control the power. They are master political strategists who ride the tide and turn the surge to their advantage.

But the hearts of patriotic Pakistanis bleed to find the nation divided on various planes, into various segments and nationalities destroying the very fabric of national cohesion. It is all due to misconceived notions of misguided elements in the garb of nationalism, religion and factionalism.

The present government has inherited a plethora of problems i.e. contradictions between the rich and the poor, between the federation and the federating units, intolerance and economic crisis. President General Musharraf has the genuine desire to establish genuine democracy; to create a society free from corruption, nepotism and loot and plunder, but he can do so by aligning with anti-status quo forces.

Every body should understand that there could be no supremacy of the constitutions, concept of the rule of law, freedom of judiciary, adult franchise or fundamental rights until the remnants of feudalism were done away with. The Third World countries, directly or indirectly, have suffered from the after-effects of colonization. In the countries where leadership with vision emerged, feudalism was abolished and today they have strong democratic institutions.

The present government has inherited a plethora of problems i.e. contradictions between the rich and the poor, between the federation and the federating units, intolerance and economic crisis. President General Musharraf has the genuine desire to establish genuine democracy; to create a society free from corruption, nepotism and loot and plunder, but he can do so by aligning with anti-status quo forces.

are not strong enough to sustain its body". This meant that on the infrastructure of decadent feudalism, the superstructure of democracy could not be built up. In Pakistan, the extent of feudal hold could be gauged from the fact that there were 71 feudal in a national assembly of 80 members. In this backdrop, how it could be possible to build up institutions for democracy and promote democratic values. In a society imbued with democratic traditions and values, nobody can entertain ideas of having an autocratic or military set-up. But when feudal culture and outlook pervade all strata of society; when political parties conduct political affairs in an undemocratic

lost self-confidence, financial failure of government, and inept use of force against rebels. In case of China, together with other uniformities it was foreign occupation that united the communists and nationalists, but once they got rid of the yoke, they went to carve out separate states for themselves---China and Taiwan.

After the Second World War, the western countries scared of communism introduced reforms and provided incentives to the workers. The governments also provided allowances to the unemployed and took measures to improve their living standards; this way they were able to keep peace