

Democracy in Pakistan

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In the beginning, Musharraf had got a God-given opportunity, but unfortunately he lost it. When the corruption-ridden Nawaz Sharif regime was ousted, he was widely acclaimed as a hero by the masses in Pakistan as if a messiah had descended from heaven to solve all their problems. But his later performance constantly decreased his support and the masses started getting frustrated. This is the problem with every dictatorship. After a while people start getting disenchanted and alienated, as they have no role to play in the political decision-making process. People start losing the sense of participation. That is the merit of democracy that the masses maintain that sense. Despite all his sincerity for the betterment of the country, Musharraf's alienation from the masses is the natural corollary of a form of government in which a messiah is supposed to cure all the ills of the country. People have started feeling betrayed by an uncalled-for intruder in the affairs of their country. They have reached a stage where they are again ready to tolerate 'corrupt' politicians, who will be from among themselves, rather than an 'alien intruder from another planet', oblivious of their national aspirations and the 'ideology' of the country.

All the previous governments in Pakistan were not only supporting the Taliban, rather they orchestrated their success against the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan. Under heavy American pressure, Musharraf alienated all who were wedded to this stance, thanks to the turnaround on this policy. He was hailed in the West, but this turnaround was not universally liked in his own country, as his policy resulted in bringing the Northern Alliance into power, which had never been friendly to Pakistan. The first act of a minister of the Alliance was to fly to India, direct from the UN-sponsored conference in Germany, and issue a joint statement with India against Pakistan.

After the U-turn on the Taliban, followed a U-turn on the mujahideen fighting for the Kashmir cause. He did this to pacify India and to consolidate his credentials of faithfulness to the United States in accordance with his January 12 speech promises. This has demoralised the Kashmiri mujahideen, whom he had called 'freedom fighters' in his earlier meetings with Vajpayee in Agra.

Evaluating his three-year service to the Islamic ideology, the *Economist* says, "In three years as Pakistan's leader, General Musharraf has largely bleached out the Islamist colour given to the armed forces by a former dictator, Ziaul Haq. The secularists in our country have been lauding him as a Pakistani Atatürk. Islamists regard it as a betrayal of 'the ideology of Pakistan'."

His record of betrayals, as seen by the Pakistani public, is too long. Finally, he betrayed democracy. Even his supporters in the Western media started criticising him and dubbed his referendum as 'bogus'. Now, in the eyes of a common man in Pakistan, he looks like a power-hungry general bent upon perpetuating his dictatorial hold and ruling the country along secular lines. The conclusion is that Musharraf, despite all his sincerity for the country and a clean record, untarnished by any allegations of corruption, is marching towards his increasing alienation from his own countrymen. Thus, he is proving the truth of the dictum that there have been few benevolent dictators

successful in history and he will not be one of them. This is the best example of how dictatorship, as a form of government, alienates itself from the aspirations of the people under its rule.

The crux of the problem does not lie in the individuality or the personal traits of any leader. It is the 'system' or the 'process' that counts. Through what process one has emerged as a leader will be a decisive factor to lead a country out of trouble and turmoil.

The world has ultimately reached a final conclusion after experimenting with different forms of government in history. Monarchy, oligarchy, military or civil dictatorships and similar other forms of the government have all failed, irrespective of sincere wishes of the individual leaders who came to the fore through any of these processes. In line with the lessons of history and despite all its past experiences of failure, there is no other messianic way out to lead Pakistan toward a progressive state except to establish the roots of democracy firmly. We should examine the causes of failure and the ways and means to rectify them.

It has been ruled by generals for more than half of its history. They came in the name of rooting out the corruption of the politicians but actually they weeded out the seeds of democracy from the country. Instead of believing in democracy, the people started to believe in the 'miracles' of some incoming messiah from the ranks of the soldiers. In the end, they always found themselves more disappointed by the 'alienated' generals than by the 'corrupt' politicians.

Secondly, mass illiteracy is mentioned as a basic cause of failure. But this is not the case. Even an illiterate human being has his own concept of moral values, his own likes and dislikes, his own standards of right and wrong, his own sense of good and evil. He can take a decision concerning what is good for him, for his family and for his country. Lack of education does not prevent him from taking a right decision. Lack of character, integrity and a moral sense makes the real difference. If he is a responsible man with the fear of God instilled in him, he will make a responsible decision to vote for an honest and God-fearing leader without any fear or other considerations.

Therefore, the success of democracy in a Muslim country like Pakistan depends on the success of the efforts towards the implementation of the ideology of Pakistan. But unfortunately Musharraf had been driving them toward secularisation of the country. The Islamisation of the country will not make people religious fanatics but will train them to be responsible citizens to choose honest leaders in elections to root out corruption and to work for a modern progressive state.

The third ingredient necessary for the success of democracy in Pakistan is to emancipate the rural areas from the clutches of the local landlords, i.e. to take steps for the abolition of the 'jagirdari' system. Religious scholars like Maudoodi and other ulama have long ago issued religious decrees, i.e. fatwas for their abolition. Their point is to investigate the origins of landlords in our country. Most of them will be found to have gained rights on the lands as awards from the colonial British masters. They got these rewards for acting as traitors, who sided

and supported the British, betraying the common interests of the ordinary people.

The Indian masses are also illiterate and uneducated like the masses in Pakistan. But the power of landlords has been broken over there by successive Indian governments. As a result, it is now recognised as the second largest democracy in the world after the US, while Pakistan, until recently, was defined as a rogue state. Musharraf has neither the capacity to grasp the gravity of this problem nor has he displayed any enthusiasm for the reform of landlordism.

Fourth, he was not found serious or sincere enough for the accountability of the corrupt politicians and bureaucrats. He allowed the big fish to escape from the net. After freeing the main culprit of corruption, Nawaz Sharif, whom the court had sentenced to death, he is now trying to catch the small fish. But, in this process, he has lost all credibility.

Had the elections been held after the accountability of corrupt politicians, without holding his bogus referendum, there would have been some hope that the leaders elected through such process might have been able to save the country in the long run.

Fifth, an important phenomenon on the political horizon of Pakistan needs to be observed carefully. Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif have been elected twice to the seat of power. It means that despite all the illiteracy and the hold of local landlords in rural areas, a change of government had been effectively taking place. Whenever their governments were found guilty of inefficiency and involved in corruption, people threw them out of power. The influence of local landlords and their own lack of education and illiteracy did not prevent them from making their own judgment of the prevailing situation and acting according to their observations and experiences regarding different governments.

This fact throws light upon the necessity of one more ingredient for the success of democracy in Pakistan. This fifth ingredient is concerned with the period of elections and the period for the prime minister. In this regard, the system prevailing in Japan is very successful and that should be adopted for Pakistan. The term of office for the prime minister is two years and for the elected, Diet of the legislative bodies' members is four years, but countrywide elections are held every two years for fifty per cent of the legislative bodies' seats. With a gap of two years, half of the Diet members are elected for four years. The term of the remaining uncontested half members would expire after two years, when they can be elected again for four years.

A period of two years is quite enough to draw conclusions. The popularity or the efficiency of every government comes to the fore very clearly. If the people are given a choice for elections every two years, there would be no need for the president or the military to remove any corrupt or inefficient, unpopular prime minister. Instead of military coups every now and then, new elections every two years would wipe out the corrupt politicians and thus the democratic process and its traditions will be established firmly. In addition to the accountability in courts, this accountability through elections will provide a double check. Besides, Press freedom, which Pakistan is already enjoying, also provides a strong check against political and bureaucratic scandals.