

# Democracy made to measure

**M**ass produced ready-made clothes may be relatively cheaper than those made to measure, but their main snag is that they seldom come to the expectations of the user from all angles. One may put up with minor shortcomings as far as the colour or design of the cloth is concerned but if the piece does not sit properly on the body of the buyer, it is called a misfit. In such cases the buyer tends to keep cursing himself till the wretched thing is worn out or is thrown away by him in utter disgust. That is why a sophisticated customer is always willing to pay more and go for clothes made to measure. This has been exactly the case with democracy in Pakistan. As the new nation was in a hurry to clothe itself immediately after Partition, it could not afford to wait till a team of worthy outfitters could evolve a pattern of democracy to fit the peculiar measurements of the young nation. The best thing, therefore, was to go for ready-made democracy donated by our erstwhile masters.

It was only many years later that a more fastidious segment of the Pakistani society became aware of the misfit that needed to be discarded in favour of a pattern of democracy made to measure. It was claimed by the sponsors of the new idea that all the serious problems that Pakistan had been facing since independence were due to the ready-made democracy we had borrowed from the British. This realisation led to a series of experiments, the latest in the chain being the one called "grassroots democracy" that is still in the process of implementation.

The master tailor assured the nation that all its ills would be cured once the magic gown of "grassroots democracy" was donned. A system was evolved at a huge expense and put into operation with a great hullabaloo. It was only then that the designers realised that the sapling they had planted after preparing the ground for three long years needed very tender care for many years to develop into a full-bloomed tree to yield any fruit. The minimum requirement for its survival, or at least for its sustained growth, was a guardian angel dressed in a smart uniform and holding a rod of authority in his hand to ward off any evil eye that could threaten its existence. And there was no dearth of evil eyes in the country. In fact there were elements that were openly declaring their intentions to do away with the new system at the earliest available opportunity. To meet this challenge, a number of other protective measures were adopted so as to save the ship of grassroots democracy from sinking. The manner in which these measures were taken one after the other, showed the nervousness of the designers

of the new system. Like a person about to be drowned, they started laying their hands desperately on any bit of straw they could find afloat in the



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vicinity. In addition to some ingenious measures, no harm was seen in reviving some old political practices that had been the root cause of failure of all previous patterns of democracy in this country. Actually, anything that offered the slightest promise of preventing the demise of the made-to-measure democracy in the very first year of its birth was considered as legitimate and in the wider national interest.

It would be good for the education of the general public to get a bird's eye view of the various embellishments with which the made-to-measure democracy has been adorned since it was originally conceived. The basic idea of the whole plan was to keep every single individual and party as far away from the corridors of power as possible, so that their evil influence on the healthy growth of the sapling of new democracy could be effectively parried. Thus, some prominent political figures nourishing hostile feelings against the new system were debarred from taking part in political activities on the ground that they had been the heads of government twice and, therefore, did not deserve a third chance. Enough is enough, it was argued. And yet, if a docile individual was to be saved from the application of this rule, an apparently logical loophole was found for his benefit.

**A**gain, efforts were made to ban a particularly intolerable political party but its leaders very cleverly circumvented the rule by changing the party's designation. This forced the authorities concerned to look for alternative measures to achieve the same objective. One such measure was the disqualification of non-graduates from contesting polls for federal as well as all provincial legislatures. This debarred many a polished political figures that could have been an anathema for the new democracy. Bar was also placed on those who had been involved in some specified offences. This disqualification was also waived arbitrarily where the individual concerned gave a tacit undertaking that he would not challenge the new democratic dispensation. Thus, a number of discriminatory rules of the game were promulgated with the sole purpose of ensuring at least five more years lease of life for the new democracy. Most of these rules were drafted and promulgated with such indecent haste

that the authorities had no time to hide their ugly nature of being individual-specific, much against all canons of justice and fair play. Wherever a crude attempt was made to show a certain measure as applicable to all cases without any discrimination, it failed because soon thereafter, exceptions were announced to the particular rule to accommodate one or more favourites.

One of the obnoxious democratic traditions of yore revived during the current decade of the new century for the protection of new democracy was the creation of the king's party. It is a pity that it had to be carved out of another political party that used to claim being the recipient of the heaviest mandate in the history of Pakistan. That party was already in shambles due to the banishment of its leader and was in dire need of resuscitation, both on human and moral grounds. Instead, a deathblow was inflicted on it by engineering a split in its ranks through lucrative incentives to political deserters. This was tantamount to patting on the back of disloyal politicians who did not hesitate selling their conscience for material gains. Despite being the king's party, the new hotchpotch of politicians of various shades failed to emerge as a strong tool in the hands of the establishment on an all-Pakistan basis. It could neither form a powerful government on its own, nor in combination with other political parties. This led to an unprecedented interlude during which a process of intense bargaining among political parties and individual politicians continued for weeks on end.

A loathsome practice called "*Lotaeracy*" that had become the bane of Pakistani politics and had to be banned by law many years ago was allowed to become operative with the connivance of the establishment. It involved behind the door intrigues and the sale and purchase of human beings wearing different political garbs. As a result, many politicians accepted to play the role of "*lotas*" by leaving the parties on whose tickets they had won the election, and joining the king's party. This gave enough strength to the latter to form a government at the centre and in a couple of provinces. Most of those who had changed their loyalties and supported the king's party were duly rewarded out of all proportion to their collective strength. The funniest part of the whole game is that immediately after the Prime Minister got a vote of confidence from the National Assembly, floor crossing was again banned so that those who had changed their loyalties but were not suitably rewarded for turning their coats, did not desert the king's party in search of better pastures.

In the background of the above facts, it has to be admitted with regret that the fate of new democracy in Pakistan is not in safe hands.