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Democracy  
News

# Democracy: struggle is harder than goal

*"What is truth but to live for an idea. It is a question for discovering a truth which is truth for me, of finding the idea for which I am willing to live and die."*

— Kierkegaard



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**D**emocracy is genuine democracy encompassing political, economic and cultural dimensions, offers every one a chance to pursue worthy aims in life; and, enough sense of purpose and commitment to achieve them. Of course, there is nothing automatic about it. It makes great demands on each individual.

Democracy is not handed to anyone on a platter. The way to democracy is strewn with blood, sweat, tears, and toil. How do we get to democracy? It is determined by the development of an individual's self-awareness, his growth as a democratic personality and his ability to define correctly the substance of his life and his own role within the community. This is not something that a person can suddenly decide.

It often involves a protracted and contradictory process. It is particularly true in our country where democracy never had a fair deal.

When someone sets out to determine the meaning of his life, he embarks upon a practical and intellectual confrontation with his social environment, measuring his skills, interests, preferences and expectations against the objectively given social conditions and the claims that democracy makes on him. In doing so, he defines himself and his place in the life of the community.

Man's consciousness not only reflects the objective world, but also creates it. People like to leave a sign or two for posterity to show that they have done something worthwhile. Every one thus enters history in his own distinctive way.

True enough, thinking yourself as a participant in the making of history is a good start to define your role in society. An act which helps to solve the fundamental problems of our society, which assists in the consolidation of democracy and weakens the reactionary, obscurantist and fundamentalist forces, will at the same time enhance the dignity of the individual and confirm the equality of the person. It will bring to him optimism and joy connected with self-fulfilment. It is no use cursing darkness all the time. It is much better to light a candle. Probably it will induce others to light their candles. If thousands join, darkness will fade away, never to return.

A meaningful life, dedicated to democracy, does not have to be spectacular. It is

a simple, ordinary life devoted to the emancipation of mankind, inextricably linked with democracy. Such a life lends glory to mankind. It is a life of struggle against the forces of intolerance, dogmatism, fanaticism and opportunism which will not let democracy flourish.

In the idea of the struggle is the realisation that it is not simply understanding the world but of changing it by practising true democracy. As Iqbal puts it:

Do not dally on the shore where life's melody dies a gentle death.

Leap into the sea, fight against the waves, for immortality is won through struggle.

The world today is in the grip of a democratic revolution. Throughout the developing world, people are resisting and rebelling against authoritarian rule.

Pakistan had to face frequent breakdown of the democratic process. Now, democracy represents the zeitgeist (the spirit of the age).

**H**ence, the future is bright even though dark clouds hang over the horizon. There is a silver lining because democracy is the wave of the future. Even though democracy is the most admired form of political system, it is the most difficult to maintain. Alone among other forms of government, democracy rests on a minimum of coercion and a maximum of consent. Many of the problems that democracy has experienced in Pakistan spring from the tensions that are inherent in its nature.

First is the tension between conflict and consensus. Democracy is a system of institutionalised competition for power. Without competition, conflict and dissent there is no democracy. But any society that sanctions political dissent runs the risk of the conflict becoming too intense so as to endanger civil peace and political stability. Hence the paradox: democracy requires conflict but not too much. Conflict must be tempered by consensus. Consensus is *ijma* is an Islamic concept. We have forgotten brings us to the verge of chaos and anarchy. So many times have we fallen under the heels of military dictatorship, because we forgot that democracy could not function without a modicum of consensus.

Second is the tension that sets representativeness against governability. Democracy abhors concentration of power in the hands of a few. So, democracy subjects leaders to a mechanism of popular representation and accountability. This requires a party system that can produce a government, stable and coherent enough to represent and respond to competing interests without being captured or paralysed by them. Representativeness requires that parties speak for these conflicting interests. Governability demands and parties have sufficient patriotic sense to rise above them.

The third contradiction inherent in democracy is between consent and effectiveness. Democracy means rule with the consent of the governed.

This is the message of the people all over the world, and more so of the people of Pakistan, who are fed up with the repression and corruption of the ruling elite. They want the right to turn their rulers out of office. They want to be governed only with their consent.

To be stable, democracy must be deemed legitimate by the people, they must view it as the most appropriate form of government for their society. Because it rests on the consent of the governed, democracy enjoys popular legitimacy. This legitimacy requires a profound moral commitment which develops over a long period.

Democracy will not be valued by the people unless it effectively deals with economic, social and cultural problems, maintains law and order and brings justice.

Democracy requires consent. Consent requires legitimacy. Legitimacy requires effective performance. Widespread corruption is fatal for democracy, because it destroys legitimacy of the entire democratic process. Where the prospect of ill-gotten gain is the sole motive for the pursuit of the office, the democratic process becomes a mere power struggle rather than a contest over policies. The premium on political power becomes so great that competing forces will go to any length to win by hook or by crook. This threatens the very essence of the democratic process — fair, free, and peaceful elections.

A democratic process is not possible without democratic culture, which means a tolerance of opposition and dissent, a willingness to cooperate, accommodate, compromise and a certain flexibility, moderation, civility and restraint in one's partisanship. To nourish, cherish and honour these qualities is one of the most important challenges facing our nascent and troubled democracy.