



Democracy: our fault-line

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During the khaki rule we come to believe that military intervention is the only factor responsible for all ills of democracy. At the rare times of elected governments, we remain thrilled and excited with the single idea of dislodging the incumbent regimes. There seems something seriously wrong with us.

A democratic polity governed by civilian politicians is universally believed to be a legitimate form of government. Theoretically, no one disagrees with this dogma of democracy. But practically, we have been unable to translate democracy into operational norms.

Why democracy has not taken root in our society? One widely held belief is that had the military not interfered in the affairs of state, democracy would have taken root. Others disagree and assert that military intervenes after the recurrent failure of civilian regimes. Both assertions are two sides of one circular argument. However both separately reflect a part of reality.

In fact our cyclic political movement makes it hard to determine the causal relationship between the two happenings—presumed or real failure of civilian government, and military intervention. Actually it has become a viscous cycle: from civilian to military rule and back to civilian.

So far, the discourse on democracy in Pakistan has been predominantly theoretical or abstract in the case of

were denounced as 'authoritarian', and 'fascists' by their respective oppositions. They were often termed a 'security risk' by opposition. Every time the opposition has been obsessed with a single point agenda—to get rid off even elected governments. All this is now being explained as political engineering done by the establishment. This I contend is not the whole truth.

Actually, it is the strategy of denial employed by the political class to absolve them of their obligations. It is a defeatist excuse for not making any struggle towards 'true democracy'. Simply cursing the establishment would bring about no change in the power structure.

Certainly, the establishment plays an overwhelming role in polity. But the strength of other powers too is proportionally related to the weakness of democratic forces. The democratic forces (if there are any) must accept the challenge and responsibility to carve out space for constitutional and democratic polity.

Historically, it was the organizational weakness of the Muslim League that led its leaders to rely on bureaucracy during the early days of Independence. The gradual power-shift from politicians to civil service and military personnel could never be stopped in the following decades. We should not discount the lack of institutional strength and professional competence of the political class.

The popular argument that the