

intelligentsia, and rhetorical or hypocritical in the case of political class. Many of us are conversant with democratic theories, models, and values. But none has presented a workable doctrine addressing the conditions on ground.

Firstly, the basic unanswered question: how to bring 'democracy' down to the earth, from its theoretical abstraction? Secondly, the hype on intrusive role of military without analyzing the reasons is misleading. Thirdly, should we overlook or downplay the acts of omission and commission committed by the political class merely because they are 'entitled' to play politics?

Undoubtedly, recurrent military interventions are a part of the problem. However, the behavior and pattern of governance established by civilian politicians has not been democratic either. To put the blame exclusively on military will not offer any solution. The problem needs to be seen in a holistic and realistic manner. An idealistic-theoretical framework would not help since politics is governed by dictates of power. This, however, is not to deny the importance of moral values and principles.

Principles in politics are observed as long as they are backed by some kind of political power. We cherish democratic principles like rule of law and respect the constitution, but both are frequently violated. Why? It is because these values are politically unsupported. Similarly, the abuse of power is considered a condemnable act. But in practice it is so rampant that a public official who observes restraint and prefers to abide by the rules is dismissed as 'weak' and impotent.

Thus abuse of power cannot be stopped unless the abusers are made to pay the cost for their transgressions. To make the authority accountable to the people and to empower the people politically, so as to deter or punish the abuse of power, are closely inter-linked processes which need to be backed by the will of the people expressed in an institutionalized form.

Have we any political mechanism to prevent the abuse of power? No, rather we seem trying to run democracy without initiating such processes and institutions. A party system characterized by free contest between organized parties is non-existent for various historical and cultural reasons.

Our political elite's commitment to democracy is only skin deep. Democracy to them is merely an exercise that brings them into power. Beyond this they have no use of the term 'democracy'. For example they always demand free and fair elections in the country but would not practise the same at party level. Whenever they are voted into power they become as dictatorial as are the non-elected governments.

Elected Premiers, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Nawaz Sharif and Benazir,

establishment did not allow political parties to function normally is only half-truth. Our political parties have never attempted to put their own house in order. No internal democratic mechanism exists either to elect the party hierarchy or to hold the leaders accountable. When in power, no party has inspired the confidence of people in democracy. If democracy means something substantive, these facts have to be faced in a straight manner.

Instead of addressing these issues, the mainstream parties are observing a hand-off strategy or simply a blame game under the pretext that the establishment does not let them do anything. Politics is the art of compromise and of possibilities, and an actor has to work within the existing power structure until he or she is able to transcend and change that. Antidote to power is only power.

Political parties' ultimate strength lies with the people. If the parties transform themselves into viable organizations with proper homework, people would surely come to their side. The power of the establishment cannot stand in the face of people's organized power. But the sad reality is that our so-called democrats are as remote from the concerns of the people as is the establishment.

It is fallacious to presume that civilian rulers, merely by virtue of being civilian, are lesser autocrats. It is claimed that the elected rulers have never been given free hand to make vital decisions. One fails to understand what compels them to be ruthless and undemocratic in the areas where they enjoyed reasonable freedom of action. Not in the too distant past, the ruling party physically assaulted the highest court of Pakistan. The elected Prime Minister made a serious attempt on the constitution through the abortive Fifteenth Amendment (to the constitution).

To charter a democratic course for the future we must remember our past in order to learn a lesson. However, the selective use of history would not work. Intellectual honesty, impartiality, and objectivity demand an unbiased analysis of our political predicament. Our current discourse on democracy offers little, in practical terms, to break the cycle of moving between military and civilian rule.

A new paradigm with two main aspects is required. One: it needs to factor in all major obstacles to democratization. Two: besides highlighting the excessive involvement of military in politics, the politicians should also be encouraged to adopt a pro-active and organizational approach. Without gaining strength of institutionalized parties and people's trust, political class can neither sustain the pressure from powers that be, nor can they keep the country on democratic track. There seems no other way to escape the vicious cycle.