

# Perceptions about democracy

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The Nation

There are varying perceptions about democracy in Pakistan.

In a perpetual state of crisis the requirements of governance had to be adjusted to meet threats and opportunities that every emerging situation brought with it. In spite of three wars with India the Kashmir issue is still unsettled. With the end of Taliban government in Afghanistan, Pakistan has, at least for the time being, lost what is termed as the "Strategic Depth" -- in the event of an Indian invasion, the Pakistan military would take up positions to protect Islamabad.

They would indeed require lines of communication into Afghanistan. Pakistan must have stability, on at least one border. As President Musharraf told General Tommy Franks, Pakistan Air Force had been crippled by American arms embargo. This was the only reason Pakistan had invested so much wealth and energy into developing ballistic missiles. And that we never intended to begin an arms race. "Our weapons are meant to maintain peace with Honour and to preserve our dignity. They are a deterrent, not a first-strike capability."

Pakistan itself is victim of terrorism, yet it has played a vital and a significant role in the war against terror. In spite of achievement and success in this context Pakistan continues to be pressurized. The world community, though, has so far not acted to take due notice of India's state-terrorism and human rights violations in occupied Kashmir. These and other complex issues, domestic and international, are the defining pillars of democracy in Pakistan.

When there is a voice from outside for establishing a democratic system

in Pakistan it is perhaps a compulsion on the part of the movers to facilitate their own operations in Pakistan. When there is no such demand it means the priorities are something else. In such situations our President's uniform becomes a contributing positive factor.

Referring to his interaction with President Musharraf, General Tommy Franks recorded in his autobiography the following: "As we spoke, it struck me that it was appropriate we both wore uniforms. For years, American officials and diplomatic envoys in business suits had hectoring soldier-politicians such as Pervez Musharraf about human rights and representative government. Of course I believed in these issues with equal conviction, but at this point in history, we needed to establish priorities. Stopping Al-Qaeda was such a priority, and Musharraf was willing to help." Whereas the autobiography reflects on American attitudes and approach it also points to President Musharraf's wisdom, understanding of complex situations and issues and his best effort to safeguard Pakistan's national interests, specially, after September 11, 2001.

It has been rightly observed that nepotism and corruption had weakened the democratic institutions in the past and severely damaged the very fabric of the society. Honouring and fulfilling pledges made to the people, the parliamentarians should participate in the development process and ensure that benefits of economic growth and stability pass on to the common man. Public representatives have to show performance or

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quit. To be effective, a national government must be capable of strong action, and have strong leadership. Otherwise democracy cannot survive. The history of personal freedom in a country should be a matter of pride. Where the civil liberties of people have not been adequately protected, the failure is one of government inaction, not government action. There is need for an organized society.

The real question, of course, is not the power of the government itself, but how that power is used to promote justice and national well-being. Where there are situations of potential concentration of economic power or emerging vested interests or monopolies, it requires the countervailing pressures of a forceful, democratic government as a watchdog. It is this sense of government as a third force, representing the public interest at home and abroad, which is required to protect both freedom and democracy. Today's democracies have to cooperate and work together for international action to prevent political, social, and economic chaos; and for advancement and creative control over world problems.

Evaluating the nature and stature of democracy in Pakistan requires not yes or no answers but a review of the literatures about the concept and its practice. Democracy is the product of long tradition and evolution. Government by the people is possible but highly improbable. The difficulties of self-government are manifest throughout the world. Men do not always use their freedom of speech and of the press in quite the rational and disinterested way that they are supposed to.

In addition to defects of concept and content, classical democratic thought is marked by a strikingly un-historic spirit. It grandly and inexplicably conceived of democratic society as an organ created by a single act of human will and reason, ignoring the empirical lessons of history and numberless obstacles and discontinuities in the way of the evolution of representative government. There are powerful limitations on human action imposed by history, from the incalculable difficulties of building a free society to the basic incapacity of man to create viable institutions out of the abstractions of pure reason.

There has developed, writes Walter Lippmann, "a functional derangement of the relationship between the mass of the people and the government". "The people", he writes, "have acquired power which they are incapable of exercising, and the governments they elect have lost powers which they must recover if they are to govern". Democracy must come to terms with man's weaknesses and irrationalities while reaching for the

best that is in him. A reconstructed philosophy of self-government must replace an ingenuous faith in human nature. And with a realistic *faith in human capacity*, recognizing that self-government, though the best form of political organization that men have devised, is also the most difficult.

A political leader is chosen because of his/her supposed qualifications for the job. If he/she is qualified, he/she should be allowed to carry it out according to his/her own best judgment. If his/her judgment is found defective by the electors, he/she can and should be removed. The constituents, however, must recognize that the political leader has a duty to his office as well as to them and that their duty in turn is to fill the office but not to run it. We must distinguish between the functions of representation and of government, requiring our elected leaders to represent us while allowing them to govern.

In our times when governments have to deliver beyond national borders and most often operate as part of international cooperation, the enormously complex and slow-moving procedures of government are not adequate to meet both the dangers and opportunities of foreign relations. "Foreign politics", wrote Tocqueville, "demand scarcely any of those qualities which a democracy possesses and they require, on the contrary, the perfect use of almost all those faculties in which it is deficient. These are qualities which more especially belong to an individual, or to an aristocracy". The power that is the source of an effective foreign policy must be recognized and made commensurate with the responsibility.

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