**Pakistan: a democracy without a functional parliament**

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February 13, 2020

The rise of democracy in Great Britain coincided with the rise of parliament. Pakistan’s political [history](https://dailytimes.com.pk/539339/a-strong-grip-on-pakistans-rich-history/), however, is altogether a different tale. From constituent assembly of 1947 to the incumbent Majlis-i-Shura, we witness but a deliberate emasculation of public representatives. Political engineering through experimenting with constitution, stealing elections and imposing direct or indirect military rule has corrupted the political fabric of the country to the core. Resultantly, what we see today is a handicapped and ineffective parliamentary system which is failing once again to deliver upon the promises made to the electorate.

The Independence Act, 1947 provided for the partition of India and the establishment of two independent dominions namely India and Pakistan. The Constituent Assemblies of the two dominions were given the power to frame constitution of their liking. Pakistan, unlike India, seems to be experimenting with the constitution till today. The constitution was supposed to ensure greater provincial autonomy through a federal structure and firmer accountability of the powerful through parliamentary democracy as advocated by Jinnah and his companions in All India Muslim League.

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However, the progress towards realization of this goal has been rather dismal. The Objectives Resolution of 1949, fatally ignoring Jinnah’s inaugural speech in the constituent assembly, envisioned a Pakistan divided on communal lines by inserting clauses that were objectionable for religious minorities. Later, creation of One Unit and Parity Principle were tantamount to a systematic assault on provincial autonomy and rights of Pakistanis in the Eastern wing. Further, the constitution of 1962 under the military rule completely diverted from the original aspiration of the people of Pakistan by imposing a Presidential System to procure maximum control over the state affairs. Afterwards, Zia and Musharraf regimes mutilated and disfigured the constitution of the country to gain and sustain governmental power.Today, even the current civilian government has expressed its suspicion over the 18th Constitutional Amendment which restored the constitution to its original shape and also abolished the infamous concurrent list. This abysmal situation indicatesthat after 73 years of our independent history, we are still struggling withfundamentals of our constitution.

General elections in the country too remained defective with respect to frequency and transparency. For almost half of its independent history, the country has experienced direct military rule. For the remaining years, with exception of a few occasions, accusations of widespread electoral fraud erupted as soon as results were declared. The same is true for last general elections as all major political parties have questioned the outcome of 2018 polls. Naturally, the parliament whose mandate is doubtful is ill-equipped to assert upon its supremacy over other pillars of state.

Also, soon after the creation of Pakistan, an unrewarding “Game of Thrones” began among various contending individuals and institutions. From the dissolution of the constituent assembly in 1954 by Governor General Ghulam Muhammad to the disqualification of Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharifin 2017 by the Supreme Court of Pakistan, only elected representatives were shown the door and that too on dubious legal grounds. On the other hand, public representatives too demonstrated little will to share power with their peers in the parliament and approached accountability mechanisms with contempt and mistrust. While failing to recognize parliament as basic source of executive authority, elected heads of government mostly relied on power-structures outside of the parliament to perpetuate their regime. In result, both executive and legislature lost their constitutional ascendency overother state institutions.

One predictable outcome of the kind of democracy we have in our country is competition rather than cooperation among institutions. This excessive competitionweakens the system leaving it largely incapacitated to guarantee service delivery to the masses. Therefore, no matter how good sub-parts of the system are, the end-product of the system remainsfaulty and defective. No matter who wins this competition, the defeated are always the masses.

In conclusion, if we want to actualize the aspirations of the people of Pakistan, we must abide by the constitutional roles assigned to various offices and institutions. Rule of law and supremacy of parliament can best serve the interest of the country. Therefore, Prime Minister Khan should abandon his self-styled governance in isolation and establish a constructive engagement with all parties represented in parliament. Similarly, opposition parties should let the parliament function in a way that earns it respect and reputation while exercising its legitimate authority. The nation has suffered enough for decisions taken outside of parliament and in isolation.

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