**THE PENDULUM DEMOCRACY**

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1945 was the ‘zero year’ of the twentieth century. From 1945 to 1960, 36 states were decolonized from European imperialism. The process of decolonization was inorganically grounded with the cultural aspirations of the diverse human strata inhabiting the colonized extensions in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. It was orderly executed in some areas. However, in many others it was the consequence of protracted revolutions, bloodsheds, and massive human displacements. Some of the infant states successfully installed stable governments after acquiring autonomy; others were left with civil wars, despotic regimes, socio-political polarization, and constitutional instability. Few of them moved on by consolidating their future narratives and some still traveling on the treadmill.

George Santayana, a professor in philosophy at Harvard once said, &quot;Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.&quot; The preposition seems untrue in the case of these decolonized states; passing through periodic socio-political turbulence after volumes are written and spoken about their enigmatic past. The worse repercussion, among all, still corroding the very basis of nationalism in some of these states is the swing of narratives. Pakistan shares the club.

A religion-based identity was framed after 1940 by the All-India Muslim League to integrate the diverse population of the five provinces with distinct ethnic outlooks into a single united polity 1 ; a diversity which is an amalgamation of contrasting bloodlines hailing from Indus Valley ancient tribes, Central Asian races, Arab and Persian migrants 2 . The ethnic composition of this nation is Punjabi 44.7%, Pashtun 15.4%, Sindhi 14.1%, Saraiki 8.4%, Muhajirs 7.6%, Balochi 3.6%, other 6.3% 3 . Multiple, deep-rooted identities of caste, language, and culture have been contributing to

1 Ch Rehmat Ali, 1933, “ Now or Never, Are We to Live or Perish?” pamphlet  
2 Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism, 1991  
3 https://idea.usaid.gov/prepared/FactSheets/pakistan.pdf the societal process of the country. The minimum required integration of diverse ethnic narratives into a larger one signifying the outlook of a national polity is not completed yet.

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Pakistan emerged at the crossroads of Central Asia, South Asia, Gulf, and China with inherited geographical conflicts. In the immediate aftermath of partition, the state started operations on ad-hoc basis to tackle administrative emergencies like evacuee property disputes, border and water disputes, minorities, migration, uneven distribution of assets, and stressed foreign policy. 4 The significance of military institution was circumstantially important which turned into a classic case study of Civil-Military Relation for the students of public policy all over the world. This proved to be a fault line of the highest impact out of many others, like ethnic and sectarian polarization, the role of religion in state affairs, or the nature of foreign policy with few countries like India and the US.

The institutional incoherence is a multi-level divergence in concept framing, interests, organizational strength, and sometimes just rhetoric. The political parties are less organized, intrinsically undemocratic, and choice-based hierarchies. Their reliance on patronage and political romanticism make them vulnerable. The political narratives do not trickle down using proper party structures equipped with training and feedback. The state institutions sweep in to fill the ‘gap’. They are well-structured but not trained to deal with the complex variables of a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-layered political substrate. Resultantly, the treadmill goes on, and the vicious trap of polarization could not be liquidated even after decades.

Today, Pakistan again hosts extremities in political narratives to the extent of deadlock. The opposition political parties formed an alliance to reclaim ‘real democracy’ in the country and to mitigate the unsolicited intrusion in civilian matters. Recently they have announced an agreed-upon declaration in Lahore situating the goals of their movement. However, the document lacks any provision to induce inward democracy in political structure by introducing a skill-based promotion system and organizational discipline. On the other side, the responsibility to achieve consensus on a broader framework for national reconciliation primarily rests with the government. The political jargon, rhetoric, poor governance, and failure of the PTI-led government to engage political forces on a larger agenda for socio-economic development is further fueling the polarization.

Pakistan must quit the treadmill. The clarity of thought and purpose is seriously lacking. The national growth, health, economy, public well-being, and purchasing power of the citizens are on the exponential decline. The geo-strategic sensitivities are adding to the panic. The ceasefire between narratives is inevitable. The solution and the problem cannot co-exist in the same frame of reference. The country needs a collective statesmanship which if not thoughtfully crafted, every new day will be a bad day for the citizens of this state. The consensus democracy is built on dissensus rather than consensus, on differences in conviction and outlook on life, which need to be carefully integrated. Accommodation, pacification, and compromises are the fundamentals of this exercise. Leadership is a more moderate and less expressive affair in consensus democracy than it is in pendulum democracy.

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