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# The democratic stature of Pakistan in the contemporary world: challenges and prospects

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Pakistan holds a very important geopolitical position not only within South Asia but also in relation to the rest of the world. Connecting East and West, and with the potentiality for bridging the Global South with the North, it forms an important locus for discussing the role of democracy and democratic institutions in bringing about and sustaining peace. With attention on the 2013 election season, this article explores strategies for stakeholders within Pakistan, the aim being the improvement of prospects for democracy and prosperity.

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Pakistan holds an important geopolitical position as it connects *East* and *West*, and has potential for *Global South* as well as attraction for the *North*. It is therefore very important for Pakistan to be democratic and peaceful. This article will set forth a roadmap for with which stakeholders may engage, towards a more democratic and prosperous Pakistan. The main objective of this piece is to identify challenges for Pakistan in the democratisation process. Pakistan can be more democratic and peaceful by overcoming the identified challenges in the analysis.

Two fundamental questions are important to answer if we desire to know the democratic stature of Pakistan in the civilised world:

1. *Where* does Pakistan stand, as far as the ‘definition’ and ‘levels’ of democracy are concerned?
2. After identifying the level of democracy for Pakistan- to know, what conditions make democracy possible and what conditions will, hopefully, make it thrive in Pakistan?

These questions have to be addressed as Pakistan has definite impacts on the political setting in the South Asian region for two reasons. One, its geo-political and strategic depth being the neighboring country of China, Russia, India, Afghanistan, and Iran enhances its significance. Second, it is a primary ally with the United States in the contemporary war on terrorism in this region. And politically

speaking, fragile democracy is one of the root causes of terrorism in Pakistan because it fails to covert socio-political discontent of citizens into socio-political contentment.<sup>i</sup>

Therefore this article is equally important for Pakistan, the United States - owing to a leading role in the war on terror - and other south Asian countries where democratic values are at stake.

*Democracy is indeed a process of ‘accommodation’ involving a combination of ‘division and cohesion’ and of ‘conflict and consent’<sup>ii</sup>.*

Democracy is a process of accommodation<sup>iii</sup> means that all the contradictory political forces (political parties, religious and ethnic groups) within the state and society are to accommodate<sup>iv</sup> one-another; consciously, within the political culture. The process of accommodation must take place in such a way that the centripetal forces<sup>v</sup> (progressive and moderate socio-political forces) remain dominant over the centrifugal forces;<sup>vi</sup> (socio-political forces having inflexible and extreme ideas oppose democratic development, like religious extremists or separatists). Whenever the clash of interest between the political forces occurs, the populace must take the side of the centripetal forces and ideas to make the state socio-politically stable and balanced. During

the process of accommodation (reconciliation and adjustment of different views) division of forces; whether political parties, religious or ethnic groups, is obvious as conflict is a natural and important function or element of every developmental process. But the important thing is how the divided socio-political forces become coherent by conscious agreement upon an agenda of national interest to achieve national unity.

In the whole process of accommodation three components are very important, which are; *Nature of State, Institutions and Machinery* (Government and its Branches, Political Parties, Pressure Groups etc.) and *People or Masses*<sup>vii</sup>. Article 1(1) of the Constitution of Pakistan states that “Pakistan shall be a Federal Republic to be known as the Islamic Republic of Pakistan”<sup>viii</sup>, unfortunately in Pakistan federalism failed to be a magnet for its units as 1971 witnessed a dreadful happening – the secession of East Pakistan from the Republic of Pakistan (fall of Dhaka 1971). In any federation in the world, disagreements and differences over the sharing and allocation of resources happen. But, if these differences remained unresolved and disputes are allowed to linger on for extended periods of time they are internalised into the people's mind. This has occurred in Pakistan and that is why people of Baluchistan say ‘we are the deprived’, Punjab being referred to as the "Big Brother"<sup>ix</sup> in NWFP

and Sindh. These feelings confine people to their sub-identity rather than national identity.

The second condition of the Article 1 (1) is that Pakistan shall be an Islamic Republic, in other words, a democratic and welfare state,<sup>x</sup> but unfortunately Pakistan is neither a theocracy, a democracy nor any other discernible modern political organism. It is driven by social structure which has emerged from ethnicity, provincialism, feudal patronage, Army intervention, tribal affiliation and all the associated pre-modern forms of deliberation, negotiation and conflict that characterises the life of a Pakistani citizen. Further, it is clearly stated in Article 62 (d) of the Constitution of Pakistan 1973, that *A person shall not be qualified to be elected or chosen as a member of Majlis-e-Shoora (Parliament) unless (inter alia) ... (d) he is of good character and is not commonly known as one who violates Islamic Injunctions.*<sup>xi</sup>

Character is, basically, moral fibre and closely associated with ethical and political values while executing power and authority but in Pakistan the governmental machinery is always used to achieve self interests beyond moral, ethical and political values. Where the third component is concerned; the people of Pakistan fail even to break ethnic and linguistic chains in spite of the miserable conditions they are in due to these barriers and the only solution of their pains is that they must overthrow these chains.

Now that when we apply the given definition of democracy to Pakistan as a sovereign state, in order to analyse the stature of Pakistan as far as the levels of democracy are concerned. Unhappily, in Pakistan existing socio-political and economic conditions cause the quality of democracy to deteriorate because when we talk about democratic system we actually mean: *Better Functioning of Institutions, Good Governance, and Satisfactory Feedback from Public*<sup>xii</sup> - Response on the policy making and decision making:

- As far as the *Better Functioning of Institutions* is concerned; the crisis between judiciary and executive, the Number Game Politics by political parties beyond the political values, obstructed free and fair elections due to 35 million people being out of the electoral process; they are not registered in electoral as voters in Pakistan, the intervention of the high governmental offices in the elections of State Azad Jammu Kashmir in 2011; all this, indicates the dire situation of institutional workings in Pakistan.
- The Sialkot incident on 15 August 2010, the continuous target killing in Karachi; during the first week of July 2011 more than 100 people were killed, the attack on GHQ Rawalpindi and Naval Base Karachi, the law and order situation in “KUTTI PAHARI, QASBA COLONY’ Karachi in

July 2011, the poor law and order situation in country during 2012, 105, 80 and 45 people killed in bomb blasts in Quetta and Karachi in January to March 2013, Joseph Colony (the Christian colony) in Lahore city was burnt by extremists on 09 March 2013, all these put a question mark over the *Mode of Governance* in Pakistan.

- As far as the *Public Response* to policy making is concerned the common man is dissatisfied up to the level of despair and this has resulted in less political participation because: 50 million people are without access to food due to ‘food inflation’ which rose from 2.50 percent in 2001-02 to 12.03 percent on 2009-10, the inaccessibility to clean drinking water for 17 million people, 54 million people are without basic sanitation facilities, 14% unemployment, 34% people are living below the poverty line, poor health conditions - 63 million people do not have access to health facilities and only one doctor is available per 1183 people, considerable issues in education sector – inconsistent educational system, 60% schools in Punjab province lack basic facilities, Crises of Electricity reached up to 4700 MW shortfall in July 2011, 18 hours per day electricity load shedding is going on at present, CNG is not available 4 days in a week, in short severe energy crises have been seen by the people of

Pakistan in 2012 and even in the early months of 2013, the Memo scandal, N.R.O (National Reconciliation Ordinance), Non-developmental utilization of Foreign Aid, Heavy Loans from IMF, Foreign Policy imperatives within International and regional security paradigm, Rent seeking, Policy Corruption etc. are against the public opinion. All aforementioned conditions are making the common man less concerned and aloof from the affairs of state because they do not know what to do about it. This widened the gap between the 'Ruling Class' and those being ruled, making it even more difficult to bridge the gulf.<sup>xiii</sup>

In the present scenario ties between the state and the common man have weakened, consequently, national spirit and ties could not built up and nationalism is on the decline in Pakistan. People are alienated into groups and prefer the individual or group agenda over the national interest. They think that their socio-political and economic needs are being fulfilled due to the attachment with the group not the state. This narrow attachment opposed to democratic values. Consequently, the aforementioned conditions deteriorate the whole process of democratization and the democracy in practice has not been seen with the public and institutions in Pakistan.

Now it is very important to answer the question that where Pakistan stands as far as

the level and stature of democracy are concerned. First; Impulsive/Premature Level or Stage of democracy<sup>xiv</sup>-at this level institutions for transition to democracy are established in a state but democratic norms and values are absent within the institutions; like, political parties are there but democratic standards are absent within the party system, institutions are there to establish the writ of democratic regime but fail to do that, democratic government is there but citizens are not benefited with the fruits of democracy, which results in ties between citizens and the state being weakened and although the nation is there, national bonds are deficient.

Democratic rules and procedures exist but meritocracy<sup>xv</sup> is deficient because of absence of impartiality and just system. People prefer to use Traditional Political Leadership. In short this is the early period of any democratic state when outlook is democratic but the practices are not, attributable to slothful political process.

Second; Possible Level-this is the second and most important stage of democracy when a state is passing through a transitional phase from impulsive to possible level, therefore it is difficult to draw a line clearly between the two, consequently, many controversies, conflicts and confusions regarding nation, governance, leadership and institutions emerge as in the case of western countries from the period of 1890-1920.<sup>xvi</sup>

This is a severe controversial period as far as the political leadership is concerned.

Because people want modern political mind set but without losing traditional leaders - leaders only pretend to be modern politically in order to get public support but actually the traditional mindset works behind their political behavior. Democracy on the other hand deals with the process of institutionalization that systematizes and channel social phenomena inline with the democratic values. Two main indicators at 'Possible Level' are identified; (i) refinement and transformation of institutions and (ii) accommodation of different political forces at public level. At first judicial system is transformed and secondly the political process remains intact even in the presence of disruptive and divisive issues. But intricacy of ideas, actions and decisions has been observed at institutional level during this transitional phase.

Third; Thrive Level - at this level the democratic norms are clearly seen within the public and institutions, undemocratic values are exceedingly discouraged to obsolete and set back. Moreover the public is benefited at the best level with the fruits of the democratic process and the welfare state emerges, consequently, State and Society own each other. The Modern Political Mind Set within the Leadership dominates. The United

Kingdom, Germany and Sweden are the best examples for this.

By applying, carefully, the *Level theory of Democracy* to Pakistan, up till the *Restoration of Judiciary to its Role* not by means of restoration of the personalities, the major period of the life of Pakistan stands clearly for the First Stage-Impulsive or Premature Level or Stage of democracy, as Democracy within the institutions, the link between state and society, the delivery to Public by the state, Issues of governance and even the definite process of institutionalisation were absent. Although some economic development was there this is not a defining component of democracy as we have seen in the case of Kuwait, Nazi Germany etc. Therefore when the Judiciary was restored to its original role the definite process of institutionalization started in Pakistan which is the foremost component of the Second Level of Democracy - Possible Level of Democracy, as the establishment of the justice system, and the impartial role of the judiciary, is extremely significant.

While concluding this article it is very important to highlight the potential present in Pakistan to cope with the challenges and remove the hurdles in the way of democratisation. This immense potential for socio-political change in a positive direction in Pakistan involves social movements, the

multipart system, political alliances, the emergence of new political parties, independent electronic media and youth movements. It is therefore predicted that the people of Pakistan will be able to remove the traditional leaders - they are unable solve the real issues of the common man, like poverty, socio-political insecurity etc., - by showing their awareness and right to vote? General elections held in May, 2013 proved that Pakistan Tehrek-e-Insaf (PTI); the political party of youth, has not only won a good number of seats in National Assembly but also

formed government in Khyber Pukhtoon Khaw (KPK) province. If the leadership of this liberal and youth driven political party remains successful in resolving the aforesaid issues particularly terrorism, educational inconsistency and economic backwardness with clear strategy the youth will extend its support for PTI in future elections also. Consequently, it will lead Pakistan a step ahead towards a more democratic regime. A politically stable and democratic Pakistan is essential for regional and international peace and security. 🇵🇰



## End Notes

<sup>i</sup> Source: adapted from Matenia P. Sirseloudi. Early Detection of Terrorist Campaigns. *Forum on Crime and Society*, Winter 2004/05 (Special Issue on Terrorism, edited by A. P. Schmid); partly based on PIOOM Checklists for Country Dispute and Tension Profiles; PIOOM Checklist for Country Conflict Escalation Profiles. In: Alex P. Schmid. *Thesaurus and Glossary of Early Warning and Conflict Prevention Terms*. London, FEWER, 2000, pp. A 2–A 43. For a discussion of these indicators, see M.P. Sirseloudi's forthcoming article in *Forum*.

<sup>ii</sup> D.A. Rustow, 'Transitions to democracy: towards a dynamic model', *Comparative Politics*, 2, 1970, pp.337-63

<sup>iii</sup> Reconciliation or settlement of opposing views, OR adjustment, as of differences or to new circumstances; adaptation, settlement, or reconciliation

<sup>v</sup>The forces that attract different scattered parts towards one centre and create a sense of unity among the members of a group, are called centripetal forces

<sup>vi</sup>Centrifugal Forces act like a centrifugal-pump of tube-well or a fountain, which separates single stream of water flowing in its hose, into numerous parts and spreads it in different directions

<sup>vii</sup> "The Practice of Comparative Politics", Edited by Paul G Lewis and David, Open University Set Book, p117-132

<sup>viii</sup> Constitution of Pakistan 1973 Article 1(1)

<sup>ix</sup> In Cultural context "Big Elder Brother" is used in Pakistan for the 'Punjab Province', as other provinces have feelings that Punjab makes them deprive of their right by capturing the resources as Elder Brother does.

<sup>x</sup> Characteristics of Islamic State, by Muhammad Hashim Kamali, Vol. 32, No. 1, Spring 1993: An Islamic state is a state that has adopted Islam and has its own social, political and economic system to facilitate citizens in fulfilling their socio-political and economic needs. Islamic State is not about the Muslims only but also it has definite law about the non-muslim community. Islamic State is always a welfare state, but if government is muslim and citizens do not have basic facilities of life then the state will be muslim but not Islamic; like Pakistan, in practice, is a Muslim state but not an Islamic state because its citizens do not have equitable access to basic facilities of life.

<sup>xi</sup> Constitution of Pakistan 1973 Article 62(d)

<sup>xii</sup> "The Practice of Comparative Politics", Edited by Paul G Lewis and David, Open University Set Book, p117-132

<sup>xiii</sup> Factual Numerical Data is collected from the following sources:

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- Government of Pakistan, Ministry of Finance, *Pakistan Economic Survey 2009-10*
  - World Bank, *U.S. Census Bureau, International database*; Planning Commission
  - S. Akbar Zaidi, *ISSUES IN PAKISTAN ECONOMY*, Second Edition, Oxford University Press, p 09

<sup>xiv</sup> D.A. Rustow, 'Transitions to democracy: towards a dynamic model', *Comparative Politics*, 2, 1970, pp.120-127

<sup>xv</sup> In meritocracy decisions at all levels are made under existing democratic rules and merit is strictly followed

<sup>xvi</sup> Ibid, p,120 (from-2:Some examples)

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