Democracy in Pakistan

Hasan - Askari Rizvi
House No. - 132, Block – C
Lahore
Email: har51@hotmail.com

Paper prepared for the Project on
State of Democracy in South Asia
as part of the Qualitative Assessment of Democracy
Lokniti (Programme of Comparative Democracy)
Centre for the Study of Developing Societies
Delhi
Democracy and participatory governance are popular political notions in today’s world. Fair and free elections are the key pre-requisite of democracy. However, democracy lacks substance unless the electoral process is coupled with the supremacy of the constitution, the rule of law, and civil and political rights and freedoms for the people. The state must practice the principle of equal citizenship irrespective of religion, caste, ethnicity and regional background. It must also ensure equality of opportunity to all for advancement in social, economic and political domains and guarantee security of life and property of its citizens.

While it easy for the rulers, political leaders and parties, and others to pronounce their commitment to these principles, the real challenge lies in making them operational. The key question is how does one create and sustain institutions and processes that reflect the spirit of democracy and participatory governance? A large number of states are unable to fulfill these conditions. The commitment of many rulers, leaders, and organizations to democracy is merely rhetorical or they view democracy as an instrument to achieve power and then implement a partisan non-democratic agenda. Others selectively employ some aspects of democracy to create a façade. Still others hold elections, establish elected legislative bodies and install elected governments but do not empower these institutions and the people holding key positions in them. Power is thus exercised by an elite group while a semblance of democracy is created to legitimize its rule. These operational realities create the problem of quality and substance of democracy.

Professed Values and Operational Realities:

In Pakistan, the rulers, political parties and leaders and the civil society groups support democracy at the normative or conceptual level. The politically active circles demand representative governance and participatory decision making in the political and economic fields. They highlight fair and free electoral process, the rule of law, socio-economic justice and accountability of those exercising state power as the pre-requisites for a political system.

However, there are serious problems with these principles at the operational level in Pakistan. Power structure and style of governance often negated these principles. Most rulers, civilian and military, pursued personalization of power and authoritarian style of governance, assigning a high premium to personal loyalty and uncritical acceptance of what the ruler or the party chief decides. This was coupled with partisan use of state apparatus and resources, and an elitist and exploitative socio-economic system.

A conflict between the professed democratic values and the operational realities of authoritarianism and non-sustainable civilian institutions and processes is the main feature of Pakistani political experience. The redeeming feature of this conflict is that despite the long spells of authoritarian and military rule, the theoretical commitment to democracy and participatory governance has persisted in Pakistan. None of the two political trends has been able to overwhelm each other. If democracy could not function on a continuous basis, the authoritarian and military rule did not get accepted as a normal or legitimate political system. This engenders the hope that the overall commitment to democracy would continue to persist as one of the most cherished norms in the polity and a governance system that falters on democracy would not be able to cultivate voluntary popular support.

The failure to institutionalize participatory governance has caused much alienation at the popular level. A good number of people feel that they are irrelevant to power management at the federal and provincial levels. The rulers are so engrossed in their power game that they are not bothered about the interest and welfare of the common people. Such a perception of low political efficacy is reflected in the declining voting percentage in the general elections. A good number of voters maintain that their vote does not matter much in the selection of the rulers. Invariably they express negative views about the rulers as well as those opposing them. Despite all this, the people have not given up on democracy. While talking about their ‘helplessness’ with reference to changing the rulers, they continue to subscribe to the norms of democracy and participatory governance and emphasize the accountability of the rulers. They are therefore vulnerable to mobilization for realization of these norms and values.

The political system of Pakistan is characterized by intermittent breakdown of constitution and political order, weak and non-viable political institutions and processes, rapid expansion of the role of the military-
bureaucratic elite, military rule and military dominated civilian governments, and authoritarian and narrow-based power management.

Pakistan’s political history can be divided into different phases with reference to the dominant style of governance and political management:

1. Civilian political government:    August 1947-October 1958
   December 1971-July 1977

   March 1969-December1971
   July 1977-December 1985
   October 1999-November 2002

3. Selective use of Democracy by the Military (Post-military rule)  
   June 1962-March 1969
   March 1985-November 1988

4. Military’s influence from the sidelines on policy making under civilian governments  
   December 1988-October 1999

5. Military’s direct involvement in power management after the end of military rule; constitutional and legal role for the military  
   November 2002-till the writing of this article

Historical Overview:

Pakistan, like India, adopted the Government of India Act, 1935 with some changes to meet the requirements of an independent state as the Interim Constitution, 1947. It provided for a parliamentary system of government, although the governor general enjoyed special powers and the federal government exercised some overriding powers over provinces. Pakistan’s early rulers did not pay much attention to democratization of the political system because their major concern was how to ensure the survival of the state in view of internal and external challenges. The fear of the collapse of the state reinforced authoritarian governance and political management.

Pakistan faced serious administrative and management problems caused by the partition process. These included the division of civil and military assets of the British Indian government between India and Pakistan, communal riots and the movement of population to and from Pakistan, and the troubled relations with India, including the first war on Kashmir, 1947-48. Pakistan had to set up a federal government in Karachi and a provincial government in Dhaka at a time when it lacked experienced civil servants and military officers.

While Pakistan was coping with initial administrative and humanitarian problems, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the father of the nation, died in September 1948, thirteen months after the establishment of Pakistan. This set in motion the political trends that undermined the already weak political institutions and fragmented the political process. Most of post-Jinnah political leaders had regional and local stature and did not have a nationwide appeal which regionalized and localized politics. This made it difficult for the political parties and leaders to pursue a coherent approach towards the problems and issues of the early years. They were unable to develop consensus on the operational norms of the polity and took 8 ½ years to frame a constitution which did not enjoy the unqualified support of all the major parties, leaders and regions. By the time the constitution was introduced (March 23, 1956) a strong tradition of violation of parliamentary norms was established, the political parties were divided and the assembly was unable to assert its primacy. The effective power had shifted to the Governor General/President.
The acute administrative problems, degeneration of the political parties and the inability of the political leaders to command widespread political support enabled the governor general to amass power. He manipulated the divided political forces and decided about the making or unmaking of governments. Given the bureaucratic background of Governor Generals (Ghulam Muhammad (1951-55) and a combined military and civilian-bureaucratic background of Governor General/President Iskander Mirza (1955-1958); they could rely on the top bureaucracy and the military for support. This contributed to the rise of the bureaucratic-military elite in Pakistani politics which further undermined the prospects of democracy.

By 1954-55, the top brass of the military (mainly the Army) emerged as the key policy makers along with the bureaucracy. They made major input to policy making on foreign policy, security issues and domestic affairs. By October 1958, the Army Chief, General Muhammad Ayub Khan, overthrew the tottering civilian government with the full support of President Iskander Mirza. The latter was knocked out of power by the generals within 20 days of the military take-over. Since then the top brass of the military have either ruled the country directly or influenced governance and policy management from the background.

The first military ruler, Ayub Khan, ruled the country under martial law from October 1958 to June 1962, when he introduced a presidential constitution. Though direct military rule came to an end but the 1962 Constitution attempted to give a legal and constitutional cover to Ayub’s centralized and authoritarian rule which did not allow the growth of autonomous civilian institutions and processes, although the state media projected his rule as the beginning of a new era of participatory governance. His government’s political management and economic policies accentuated economic disparities among the people and the regions and caused much political and social alienation in parts of Pakistan, especially in what was then East Pakistan.

Ayub Khan was replaced by another general, Yahya Khan, in March 1969, who abrogated Ayub’s 1962 Constitution and imposed martial law in the country. This was another troubled period in Pakistan’s politics. The military government was unable to cope with the demands from East Pakistan for socio-economic equity and political participation. The military resorted to an extremely brutal military action in East Pakistan (March 25, 1971 onwards) and engaged in a war with India (November-December 1971). Pakistan’s military debacle at the hands of India led to the break up of the original Pakistan and the establishment of Bangladesh as an independent state. Such a major military and political setback forced General Yahya Khan to quit and handover power on December 20, 1971 to a civilian leader, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto whose Pakistan People’s Party had the largest number of the National Assembly seats in what was left of Pakistan, i.e. the present Pakistan.

Z.A. Bhutto asserted civilian primacy over the military during his rule (December 20, 1971 to July 5, 1977) against the backdrop of the serious damage to the military’s reputation in the wake of the military debacle of 1971. Initially, he retired several senior officers and changed the military’s command structure. However, his ability to assert his primacy over the military eroded when he began to cultivate the military’s support to pursue his strident policy towards India and employed authoritarian methods to deal with the domestic opposition. When the opposition launched anti-Bhutto agitation on the pretext that the government had rigged the 1977 general elections, the military led General Zia-ul-Haq, Chief of the Army Staff, had no problem in dislodging Bhutto and assuming power on July 5, 1977. The opposition parties welcomed the military take over because it removed Bhutto from power.

General Zia-ul-Haq’s martial law from July 1977 to December 1985 was the longest period of direct military rule in Pakistan. He sought political support for his rule by vowing the orthodox and conservative Islamic groups and tilted the state policies heavily in their favour. His rule was helped by his government’s partnership with the West, especially the United States, for reinforcing Afghan-Islamic resistance to the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan. As a frontline state for the U.S. policy to dislodge the Soviet Union from Afghanistan, General Zia’s government obtained international financial and diplomatic support which contributed to sustaining his military rule. His policies promoted religious extremism and militancy, undermining the prospects of social and cultural pluralism and participatory institutions and processes. These trends continued after he civilianized his military rule in 1985 by introducing far reaching changes in the 1973 Constitution and co-opting a section of the political elite to ensure his continued centrality to governance and political management.
In the post Zia period (1988-99) the elected civilian governments functioned but the top commanders closely monitored the performance of these governments and made their views on political and security matters known to them. The generals were prepared to stay on the sidelines provided their professional and corporate interests were not threatened by the civilian leaders. Therefore, governance for Benazir Bhutto (December 1988-August 1990, October 1993-November 1996) and Nawaz Sharif (November 1990-July 1993, February 1997-October 1999) was a delicate balancing act between the civilian government and the top brass of the military. The scope for autonomous political action by the civilian leaders depended on their ability to maintain cordial interaction with the top military commanders.

The military returned to power on October 12, 1999 after dislodging the civilian government of Nawaz Sharif. There were two significant changes in the disposition of the senior military commanders during the fourth phase of direct military rule. First, the military was no longer willing to stay on the sidelines and viewed itself as critical to internal stability and continuity. It advocated a direct and constitutional role for the top brass. Second, the military expanded its nonprofessional role to such an extent that it could not give a free hand to the civilian political leaders.

The military has spread out in government and semi-government institutions and pursues wide ranging commercial and business activities, especially in the fields of industry, transport, health care, education, and real estate development. It seeks assignments from the federal and provincial governments for civil construction projects. Given the military’s expanded interests and its involvement in governance, its role in Pakistan can be described as hegemonic.

The Musharraf Model:

General Pervez Musharraf, Chief of the Army Staff since October 1998, assumed power after his top commanders dislodged the elected civilian government of Nawaz Sharif on October 12, 1999. He designated himself as the Chief Executive and suspended the constitution to impose military rule, avoiding the use of the term of martial law.

General Pervez Musharraf carefully tailored the transition to constitutional and civilian rule in 2002. The underlying consideration was his staying on as an effective President in the post-military rule period and the continuation of the policy measures adopted by his military regime. The transition process was designed to share power with a section of the political leaders rather than transfer power to civilian political leaders.

He ensured his continuation in office before starting the transition process by holding a state managed uncontested referendum on April 30, 2002 to get him elected as President for five years. This was followed by the introduction of far reaching changes in the 1973 Constitution to enhance his powers and to give a constitutional cover to the role of the top brass in policy making through the issuance of the Legal Framework Order (LFO) in August. Meanwhile a breakaway faction of the PML-Nawaz Sharif, labeled as the PML-Quaid-i-Azam, was co-opted for partnership. The PML-Q enjoyed state patronage which enabled it to emerge as the single largest party in the National Assembly and it obtained a clear majority in the Punjab Provincial Assembly. The military regime’s major adversary, the PPP, came second in the National Assembly and obtained the largest number of seats (not an absolute majority) in the Sindh Provincial Assembly.

The Presidency and the intelligence agencies played an active role in creating the PML-Q led coalitions at the federal level and in Sindh and Balochistan. In the Punjab, the PML-Q had a majority to form the government. Thus, the National Assembly began to function on November 16 and General Pervez Musharraf took the oath as the elected President for five years. The provincial governments were installed in November-December and the Senate, upper house of the parliament, was elected in the last week of February 2003 and resumed functioning on March 12, 2003, which marked the full restoration of the 1973 Constitution as amended by the LFO.

Pakistan thus returned to constitutional rule with elected parliament and provincial assemblies as well as elected governments at the federal and provincial levels. However, the political arrangements were dominated by the Presidency. President Pervez Musharraf not only exercised the enhanced powers under
the LFO but he also continued as the Army Chief—an unusual combination in a democratic polity—which gave him an overriding clout in the polity.

The focal point of the post-2002 political order is President-Army Chief General Pervez Musharraf who functions as an effective ruler, overshadowing the Prime Minister and the Parliament. This political arrangement could be described as the Musharraf model of governance and political management. The effective powers are concentrated in President-Army Chief Pervez Musharraf and his army/intelligence affiliates who command the political system both at the federal and provincial levels. The establishment of the National Security Council in April 2004 which provides a legal cover to the expanded role of the top brass of the military further reinforces the position of the President and the brass of the military.

The Musharraf model emphasizes the unity of command, centralization, management rather than participation and the guardianship of the political process by the military. The elected government and the parliament have to function within the space made available to them by the top commanders. The political clout of the civilian leaders depends on their ability to work in harmony with the top generals.

The parliament and the provincial assemblies have not been able to acquire an autonomous and assertive role in the polity. The effective power at both federal and provincial levels is located outside the parliament and the provincial assemblies. Consequently, the seekers of state power and resources focus on the presidency and its Army/intelligence and bureaucratic affiliates. The assemblies have done limited legislative work and their functioning has been marred by bitter exchanges between the government and the opposition, violation of parliamentary norms, the quorum problem and boycotts by the opposition parties. The members complain about the frequent absence of the ministers from the two houses of the parliament and the inadequacy of the answers by the government to their questions. The assemblies have to make a real effort to fulfill even the constitutional requirement of the minimum working days in a year.

The prime ministerial changes in June 2004 (Zafarullah Jamali to Chaudhry Shujaat Hussein) and August (Chaudhry Shujaat Hussein to Shaukat Aziz) demonstrated the weakness of the National Assembly and the ruling coalition led by the PML. The decision for these changes was made in the presidency and the National Assembly and the PML simply endorsed it. Jamali got his budget passed from the parliament which amounted to a vote of confidence for his government. Two days later, he had to quit under pressure from the Presidency. The PML accepted the change and his entire cabinet was reappointed under the new prime minister.

This system restricts the participatory opportunities for the mainstream political parties, i.e. the PPP and the PML-Nawaz, which are viewed as the major adversaries of the Musharraf dominated political order. The confrontation between the government and the opposition has increased over time. This means that the political process is not moving in the direction of consensus building and its support base continues to be narrow, limited to the co-opted section of the political elite.

The strains in the federal-provincial relations have increased because the provinces complain about the domineering role of the military dominated federal government. The federal government has not resolved many federal-provincial issues which have created a strong impression in the smaller provinces that the federal government was deliberately doing this to keep political and financial pressures on the provinces. Some of the major issues are the determination of the National Finance Commission (NFC)Award on distribution of revenues between the federal and provincial governments,, the construction of dams for storing water and power generation, the Greater Thal Canal issue, the share of the NWFP in net profit of hydel power generated in that province, the gas royalty for Balochistan, and the federal government mega development projects in Balochistan and the construction of new army cantonments in that province. If confrontation and bitterness persist in the political system and the competing political interests do not adopt accommodating disposition the sustainability of the present political system may not be guaranteed.

Problems of Democracy

The major features of the Pakistani polity show serious problems of democracy. At times, democracy and participatory governance are either totally non-existent or their quality is poor.
Institutional Imbalance: Pakistan inherited institutional imbalance at the time of independence in August 1947. The state apparatus, i.e. the bureaucracy, the military and the intelligence services, was more organized and developed than the political and democratic institutions. Further, the first Interim Constitution, 1947, also strengthened bureaucracy and authoritarian governance. This imbalance was reinforced by two inter-related trends in the political domain.

First, the process of political decay and degeneration was set in motion soon after independence. The Muslim League that led the independence movement, lacked sufficient organization and capacity for state and nation building. A good number of Muslim League leaders had feudal or semi-feudal background, and were motivated by personal or power ambition rather than building the party as a viable organization capable of standing on its own feet. Other political parties also suffered from similar problems of internal disharmony and conflict, indiscipline and a lack of direction. As a consequence, they were unable to offer a viable alternative to the Muslim League and failed to articulate and aggregate interests within a participatory national political framework. They also failed to create viable political institutions or processes capable of pursuing meaningful socio-economic policies.

Second, the bureaucracy and the military maintained their professional disposition marked by hierarchy, discipline, and esprit de corps. The serious administrative problems in the early years of independence led the civilian government to seek the support of the military and the bureaucracy. Pakistan’s security problems with India, especially the first Kashmir war, also helped to strengthen the military’s position in the polity. All Pakistani civilian governments supported a strong defence posture and allocated a substantial portion of the national budget to defence and security. The military’s position in the polity received additional boost with Pakistan’s participation in the U.S. sponsored military alliances in the mid-1950s. This facilitated weapon transfers to Pakistan and its military obtained training by Americans in Pakistan and the U.S. which increased the military’s efficiency and strike power. Thus, the degeneration of the political machinery was in sharp contrast to the increasing efficiency, discipline, and confidence of the military.

These developments accentuated institutional imbalance and worked to the disadvantage of the civilian leaders. The weak and fragmented political forces found it difficult to sustain themselves without the support and cooperation of the bureaucracy and the military. This enabled the bureaucracy and the military to enhance their role in policy making and management and they began to dominate politics. In October 1958, the military swept aside the fragile political institutions and established its direct rule, with the bureaucracy as the junior partner.

The role of various civilian and military intelligence agencies expanded in the political domain during the military rule of General Zia-ul-Haq (1977-1985) when the military regime used the intelligence agencies to divide and fragment the political forces. The war against the Soviet troops in Afghanistan (1980-1989) and the linkages between Pakistani intelligence agencies and their U.S. counterparts in the context of the Afghan war helped to put more material resources at the disposal of Pakistan’s intelligence agencies. Some of these agencies have been playing active political role since 1988, helping some political parties and groups while building pressure on others keeping in view the military’s political agenda. They have interfered in the national and provincial elections which has raised doubts about the credibility of the electoral process. Some of these agencies were active in politics during after the 2002 general elections. These were also instrumental to creating the ruling coalition at the federal level and in Sindh and Balochistan after the October 2002 elections. The active political role of the intelligence agencies weakens the autonomous growth of civilian political institutions and processes.

Political Consensus-building: The democratic process cannot become functional without a minimum consensus on the operational norms of the polity. The minimum consensus is the beginning point. As the political process functions over time and it offers opportunities for sharing power and political advancement, it evokes more support from among different sections of the society and the polity. The scope of consensus widens when more groups and individuals enter the political mainstream through the democratic norms as set out in the constitution and law. This makes the political institutions and processes viable.
The Pakistani polity has been unable to fully develop a consensus on the operational political norms. Whatever understanding developed among the competing interests at one point of time was allowed to fitter away with the passage of time because of the non-accommodating disposition of the competing interests and an open defiance of constitutionalism and norms of democracy. Therefore, all constitutions turned controversial with the passage of time because they were violated by the power wielders.

Pakistan functioned without a constitution for years under martial law imposed by the Army Chief which made him the repository of all authority and power in the country. If constitution can be easily set aside or subordinated to the will of the military ruler, the tradition of constitutionalism and participatory governance cannot develop. The civilian rulers also amended the constitution in a partisan manner by employing parliamentary majority, and disregarded the need of building consensus.

A low level of tolerance of dissent and a poor tradition of open debate on important national issues has hindered the growth of a broadly shared consensus on the framework for political action. The dominant elite often endeavoured to develop selective consensus by excluding those disagreeing with them. It is not merely the dominant elite who suppress dissent, several civil society groups manifest intolerance and use violence against those who question their views.

The steady growth of Islamic extremism and militancy and Islamic-sectarian movements since the early 1980s has stifled the free flow of ideas on the issues of national importance. It gave rise to religious and cultural intolerance and increased the level of civic violence. The rival extremist religious groups did not hesitate to use violence against each other. The major victims of these trends were social and cultural pluralism, political tolerance and accommodation of dissent. The participatory processes also suffered as the religious extremists gained strength in Pakistan. Such a political and cultural environment is not conducive to growth of democracy, constitutionalism and the rule of law.

**Political Parties and Leadership:** Political harmony and democratic evolution is facilitated primarily by political parties and leaders. These are important instruments of interest articulation and aggregation and serve as vehicles of political mobilization. In Pakistan, political parties have traditionally been weak and unable to perform their main function in an effective and meaningful manner.

The role of the political parties has suffered due to, inter alia, periodic restrictions on political activities under military rule, infrequent elections, weak organizational structure and poor discipline among the members, absence of attractive socio-economic programmes, and a paucity of financial resources. Political parties also suffer from factionalism based on personality, region and ideology.

The Muslim League that led the independence movement failed to transform itself from a national movement to a national party. It suffered from organizational incoherence, ideological confusion and a crisis of leadership. The parties that emerged in the post-independence period could not present a better alternative. They suffered from the weaknesses that ailed the Muslim League. Consequently, the political parties could not work for political consensus building and political stability and continuity.

Most Pakistani political parties lack resources and trained human-power to undertake dispassionate and scientific study of the socio-political and economic problems. The emphasis is on rhetoric and sloganeering which may be useful for mobilization purposes but it cannot be a substitute to serious, scientific and analytical study of the societal problems. The level of debate in the two houses of the parliament and provincial assemblies is low and these elected bodies often face the shortage of quorum which shows the non-seriousness of the political parties and their members in the elected houses in dealing with the national issues and problems. Quite often the ministers and parliamentary secretaries are not available in the house to respond to the issues raised by the members.

The political parties or their coalitions that exercised power since the mid-1950s were either floated by the establishment (the military and top bureaucracy and the intelligence agencies) or these enjoyed its blessings. The coalition building at the national level in pre-1958 period and especially the setting up of the Republican Party in 1956, provides ample evidence of the role of the establishment in party politics. Generals Ayub Khan patronized a faction of the Muslim League which was turned into the ruling party in 1962-63. General Zia-ul-Haq pursued a similar strategy. He co-opted a faction of the Muslim League which ruled with his blessings after he restored civilian and constitutional rule in 1985. General Pervez Musharraf
has done the same by co-opting a faction of the Muslim League and installed governments under its leadership at the federal level and in Sindh, Balochistan and the Punjab in November-December 2002.

The only exception to this rule of state sponsorship of the ruling parties is the Awami League (pre-1971) and the Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) which did not owe their origin and rise to political eminence to the establishment. The Awami League won the 1970 general elections despite the strong opposition of the military government. So did the Pakistan People Party (PPP) which won majorities in the 1970s in the Punjab and Sindh. In 1971, the Awami League was pushed out of Pakistan. The military transferred power to the PPP after it lost the war to India in December 1971. The PPP continues to face the distrust of the establishment.

The political parties formed electoral alliances and political coalitions. These have generally been ephemeral in nature because of differences in their political orientations and limited experience of working together. Furthermore, each party suffers from internal incoherence which undermines its role in a coalition. Political parties have been relatively more successful as a movement for pursuing a limited agenda like the overthrow of a sitting government, than as a political party because this requires a viable organization and a broadly shared long term political agenda.

Islam and Politics: A predominant majority of Pakistanis agree that the Pakistani political system must have some relationship with Islam. However, there are strong differences on the precise nature of relationship between Islam and the polity. There is a lack consensus on the institutions and processes to be set up under the rubric of Islamic state. Most conservative and orthodox elements want to establish a puritanical Islamic state with an emphasis on the punitive, regulative and extractive role of the Islamic state. Others emphasize the egalitarian norms of Islam and underline the principles of equality, socio-economic justice and the modern notions of the state, civil and political rights and participatory governance. To them, Islam is a source of guidance and provides the ethical foundations of the polity rather than offering a specific political structure or a legal code for the modern times. Another debate pertains to the political disposition of Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan: Did he advocate an ideological Islamic state or a secular system with no links with Islam or a modern democratic state that viewed Islam as one of the sources of law and ethics? Still another issue is how far the Two-nation theory is relevant to the post-independence period for shaping political choices? Was Pakistan created as a Muslim state or an Islamic state?

General Zia-ul-Haq tilted the political balance in favour of the orthodox and conservative interpretation of the Islamic polity in order to win over the conservative and orthodox religious groups. He made several administrative and legal changes reflecting the puritanical Islamic principles as advocated by the orthodox and conservative groups. This increased religious and cultural intolerance and religious extremism in Pakistan. The official circles and the religious groups engaged in massive propaganda against the notion of participatory governance, constitutionalism, and the rule of law, equal citizenship and civil and political rights as western implants in Pakistan.

The post-Zia civilian governments were too weak to undo the Islamic laws made by the military regime of Zia-ul-Haq. General Musharraf talks of enlightened moderation as the organizing principle for the Pakistani political system but he too did not revise the Islamic laws and punishments introduced by General Zia-ul-Haq. He is constrained by the need of the support of the Muttahida-i-Majlis-i-Amal (MMA), a conglomerate of 6 Islamic conservative parties, for staying in power. The rise of Islamic orthodoxy has also increased Islamic-sectarian violence which poses a major threat to the fabric of the Pakistani society.

The inconclusive debate on Islam’s relationship with the Pakistani state and the political system adversely affects the prospects of democracy. Most conservative and orthodox Islamic groups reject democracy as a western system or support it to the extent of using the electoral process to attain power and then implement their notion of Islamic system. As long as there is a lack of consensus on the precise relationship between Islam and the Pakistan’s constitutional, legal and political system, democratic institutions and processes would not fully develop and become sustainable.
Military Rule and Constitutional and Political Engineering: The repeated assumption of power by the military and its desire to shape the Pakistani polity in accordance with its political preferences has also undermined the steady growth and sustainability of democratic institutions and processes. The military rulers either abolished the constitution or suspended it to acquire supreme legislative and administrative powers. This disrupted the development of civilian institutions and processes and made it impossible for them to develop strong roots in the polity. After every ten years or so, the military returned the country to square one, promising to introduce a system designed to respond to the needs and aspiration of the people and reflected the operational political realities of the country.

While establishing the post military rule political order the military regimes did not pursue a non-partisan approach. The overriding consideration with the military rulers was to ensure their stay in power and the continuity of the policies introduced during the period of direct military rule. They engaged in constitutional engineering either by introducing a new constitution (Ayub Khan in 1962)) or by making drastic changes in the existing constitutional system to protect the interests of the military regime. Zia-ul-Haq and Pervez Musharraf introduced far reaching changes in the 1973 constitution in 1985 and 2002 respectively to sustain their centrality to the political process and to ensure that no political party could unilaterally alter the policy measures adopted by the military regime.

Constitutional engineering was coupled with the co-option of the political elite that was willing to play politics in accordance with the rules determined by the military rulers and supported their continued stay in power. Ayub Khan, Zia-ul-Haq and Pervez Musharraf resorted to co-option of a section of the political elite. Their co-option strategy focused on some faction of the Muslim League. The strategy of co-option pre-supposed the exclusion of those who openly challenged the military-initiated political arrangements. This strategy was adopted by the above named military rulers for replacing direct military rule with new political arrangements based on sharing of power between the top brass of the military and the co-opted political leadership. Another strategy adopted by the Pakistani military rulers was the holding of carefully managed general elections to ensure that the co-opted leaders performed better than their adversaries.

The political institutions and processes created by the military regime reflected the military ethos of hierarchy, discipline and management and were often based on a narrow and selective consensus. These institutions and processes could not develop an autonomous political profile and remained closely associated with the generals. That was the major reason that they often faltered in responding to the demands for political participation and socio-economic justice. The quality of democracy was poor in the post-military rule political arrangements.

Concluding Observations:

Democracy in Pakistan faced a host of difficulties which did not let the democratic principles, institutions and processes develop firm roots in the polity. Pakistan started with the parliamentary system of governance but the legacy of institutional imbalance and authoritarianism, problems encountered in the setting up of the new state, the external security pressures and the fear of the collapse of the state adversely affected the prospects of democracy. Other factors that caused the problems for democracy included the crisis of leadership in the aftermath of the demise of Jinnah, failure of the Muslim League to transform itself from a nationalist movement to a national party, fragmentation and degeneration of the political forces and the rise of the bureaucratic-military elite. Long before the first military take over in October 1958 the dominant elite were talking about the unsuitability of liberal democracy for Pakistan.

Intermittent constitutional and political breakdown, the ascendency of the military to power and the efforts of the top brass of the military to introduce a political system that protected their professional and corporate interests made it difficult to create participatory political institutions and processes that could command the voluntary support of the diversified political interests. The military elite employed the democratic principles in a selective manner and their policy of co-option of a section of the political leaders and exclusion of others accentuated polarization and jeopardized the prospects of political accommodation and consensus-building.
The experience suggests that democratic institutions and processes stabilize and mature if their natural evolution is not obstructed by partisan considerations. These must function in their true spirit over time, offering all citizens and groups an equal and fair opportunity to enter the political mainstream and compete for power and influence. This helps to build support for the political institutions and facilitates their sustainability. In Pakistan, periodic breakdown of the political order and repeated military take-over or attempts by the top brass to shape the political process to their political preferences did not ensure political continuity and the competing interest did not get equal opportunity to freely enter the political mainstream.

Democracy and the autonomy of civilian institutions and processes has been the major casualty of the expanded role of the military. Whenever Pakistan returned to civilian and constitutional rule, the quality of democracy remained poor. It is a case of democracy deficit. The long term endurance of the political institutions and the prospects of democracy faces four major challenges in Pakistan: the non-expansion of participatory opportunities for those viewed as adversaries by the military dominated regime, the poor performance of the elected assemblies, failure to build consensus on the operational norms of the political system, and a drift towards confrontation, religious and cultural intolerance and extremism.

This does not mean that the people have given up on the primacy of the popular will, participatory governance, accountability of the rulers and governance for serving the people. The ideological commitment to these principles persists which will continue to question the legitimacy of non-participatory and authoritarian governance and political management.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


Kennedy, Charles H., et.al. (eds.), *Pakistan at the Millennium* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2003).


Ziring, Lawrence, *Pakistan in the Twentieth Century: A Political History* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1997)