

## Future of democracy in Pakistan

### Outline

- Democracy and Pakistan – Present, Past and Future
- Importance of democracy
- Threats to democracy

1. Weak political institutions
2. Influence of Military
3. Economic difficulties
4. Social Norms
5. Illiteracy – lack of political of awareness
6. Unemployment and poverty
7. Image of political leadership
8. Power politics
9. Foreign interference
10. Unbridled media
11. Feudalism and racism
12. Grievances of small provinces
13. Relation with India
14. Terrorism and extremism

#### • **Suggestions to meet the challenges**

1. Strengthening of political parties and political culture
2. Sovereignty of parliament and other statutory
3. Independence of judiciary
4. Eradication of illiteracy
5. Political awareness

6. Democratic norms
7. Economic uplift
8. Emergence of new leadership
9. Participation of youth in political process
10. Mature and tolerant politics
11. Independence of media
12. Accountability

• **Our strengths**

1. Presence of pro-democracy leadership
2. Active Civil Society
3. Independent Media
4. Determined and dedicated nation
5. Pakistani Youth

• **Conclusion**

**Essay**

In this possibly terminal phase of human existence, freedom and democracy are just more than ideals to be followed rather its necessary for survival. Noam Chomsky

Pakistan was the result of a political and democratic struggle but democracy could not flourish during 62 years of its existence. The founder of Pakistan was a great democratic statesman who envisioned a democratic and progressive Pakistan. Unfortunately his illness couldn't let him to contribute much for democracy. His death was a fine blow to the political stability of Pakistan. Liaquat Ali Khan, a devoted prime-minister elected from Eastern Pakistan was unacceptable to the ruling elite of West Pakistan and was subsequently eliminated from the political scene in 1951. These initial problems of Pakistan gave him little time to focus his attention on democratic and constitutional development of newly born state. His sudden death proved a serious blow to the nation. His successors dedicated their efforts to perpetuate their rule showing little concern to democratic development. The early years were marked with conspiracies, unethical and undemocratic tactics in power corridors of the country. This situation provided opportunity to military to intervene in politics and Ayub Khan imposed first Marshal Law in 1958. After this, army became a stakeholder in power game and ruled the country four times through coups.

The recent government has assumed power through an electoral process but after 9 years of military rule. It has not completed even two years of its formation and threats have surfaced to its existence. The current democracy is facing multifaceted challenges on economic, social, political and international fronts. This needs a sagacious approach to ensure continuance of democratic rule in Pakistan.

Today the respect of a nation in the international community is directly linked to prevalence of democracy. Pakistan has to strengthen democracy in order to earn a respectable place in the world and head towards the road of progress and prosperity.

The clouds of uncertainty are hovering over the democratic set-up in Pakistan. The major threat is absence of sound political infrastructure. Frequent Military interventions prevented growth of political culture. Political parties could not be established on modern and democratic lines. Political parties are nurseries of democracy. In Pakistan these parties are plagued with outside influence, short term goals, one man show and family politics. Political culture cannot flourish until political parties start functioning in democratic manner.

Military has emerged as a stakeholder in political process that is against the very spirit of democracy. Where it is permanent threat hanging over the government on one hand, it encourages the undemocratic forces to destabilize democracy on the other hand.

Economic difficulties are the barriers to Govt performance causing public discontent. Pakistan government is facing financial difficulties. Its economy is under developed characterized by huge trade deficit, heavy debt burden and deteriorating currency. Government lacks the requisite economic resources for public uplift. Consequently common men remain indifferent to national politics and democracy that induce undemocratic forces to intervene.

The democratic system derives its strength from people. As former American President, Abraham Lincoln, had said,

“Democracy is Govt of the people, by the people, for the people.”

Where half of the Pakistani population is illiterate and stands unaware to democratic concepts, even the major chunk of educated people remains also indifferent to political developments in the country. This allures undemocratic forces to assume the power and to their pleasure they are accorded warm welcome by the nation when they assumed the charge. Political unawareness amongst the masses poses serious threat to democracy. Democracy can flourish only if public at large get involved in the political process.

The image of political leadership has been rotten over the time. Common men tend to dislike the political personalities. They are held responsible for all the afflictions Pakistan facing today. There are deficiencies in politicians, but these are projected to the public with exaggeration of some facts along with certain myths. This mistrust of public prevents them to concern about the political process. Political instability along with economic difficulties pushed the country towards foreign dependence. Resultantly, the international powers, in pursuance of their own goals, care little to the democratic stability of the country. All the military rulers enjoyed foreign support. 75% of financial aid by USA was received during the military regime. Purportedly, these foreign players intrigue to destabilize the political set up, when their interest require doing so.

Media independence is vital to democratic stability but it must be subjected to some ethics, rules and regulations. Unfortunately, media scarcely follows the ethical and legal limits. Commercialism some time allures it to pursue yellow journalism putting aside the national interest. In order to catch public opinion, media manipulate the facts and misrepresent it to the public where constructive criticism play a positive role, undue castigation arouse public wrath for the sitting government. Consequently people start desiring change whether democratic or undemocratic.

Feudalism is negation of equality and freedom. Democracy is not just happening of electoral exercise, it is set of principles based on the concept of freedom, liberty, equality and tolerance. Elections are just one of the manifestations of democracy. While feudalism does not hinder the electoral process, it put curbs on the people's right of freedom. Masses are restrained to freely participate in the democratic process. Feudalism is still prevailing in Pakistan and people falling under its jurisdiction are treated like subjects. They can never become the active participants of political process.

Small provinces have lost their confidence on federation. Military rulers suppressed their demands. They were denied the genuine legal and constitutional rights. Though the present democratic government sought apology from Balouchs, no substantial efforts has been evinced yet to redress their woes, their anti-centre feelings, if not addressed aptly would aggravate in the days ahead.

Pakistan unfriendly relations with India overpower its domestic and international policies. Both the countries remained at logger heads since their inception. Pakistan, in order to counter the menace of Indian adventures, had to allocate major chunk of her resources for military development at the cost of negating other socio-economic sectors of the country. She has to maintain a large army in spite of having limited economic resources. Pakistan annually allocates 33% of her budget to defense on average. If relations with India are normalized, these resources may be better spent on public uplift, social welfare, education and health. If it happens it would bring prosperity that strengthens the democratic foundations of the country.

Terrorism is one of the biggest threats to survival of entire humanity. The entire world is intimidated of this menace and making efforts to counter it. Its afflictions are pervasive and engulfing the peace and prosperity of the nation. The multiple challenges lingering on democracy thus requires a multipronged struggle to counter them.

Political parties are the primary institutions of democracy in order to provide a solid foundation to edifice of democracy. Political parties have to re-organize and function on democratic lines. These have to establish their roots at grass root level and develop them like institutions open to public. Only political parties can ensure public participation in political process and inculcate the democratic values. A dedicated involvement of people at large would provide a solid base to democracy in Pakistan.

Parliament is representative institution of public. Executives must be accountable before the parliament. If all decisions are made through the parliament, it would strengthen democracy.

Judiciary is a foremost pillar of state. An independent and efficient Judiciary ensure prevalence of social justice in the society. It provides a plat-form to aggrieved citizens to seek redressal of their griveneces. If people get legal way to their redressal, it reduces the likelihood of illegal adventures. So independence of judiciary is key to strong democracy.

Educational uplift of the society makes its members well conversant to the concepts of freedom, liberty and democracy. People learn the blessings of public rule. It enhances their commitment to democracy and they can stand against the efforts to derail the political process.

Ironically, a considerable majority of educated people lack awareness to democracy. This issue must be addressed through transformation of syllabus on modern lines. Democracy, its need and its blessings must be incorporated as part of the syllabus at all levels of education. Besides this, government must join hands with media, civil society and other pressure groups to inculcate the values of freedom, liberty, human rights and democracy amongst the masses.

Political players must set good norms to strengthen democracy. Power thrust, intolerance and corruption have plagued the politics of Pakistan. Time has come to stop the old practices and follow the democratic values prevailed in developed societies. Political parties need revision regarding their structure as they lack democracy.

Economic growth brings prosperity in the life of common. A prosper society is more likely to adopt democracy and actively engage in political process. Leadership provides new direction to society and led them to the destination. Pakistan desperately needs trustworthy leadership that people follow dedicatedly.

Our youth constitute 30% of the society they are representative of new generation. Their participation may ensure structural improvements in national paradigm. It has been witnessed that during Pakistan movement youth played vital role in opinion formation and mass awareness and so is the time now. There is a need to guide our youth to take the responsibility of our tomorrow. Its the high time when youth is active and willing to welcome the dawn of democracy and it should be utilized to its fullest.

An impartial system of accountability enhances public trust on the political system. It provides enormous strength to democratic process. Moreover, it compels thousand who are charged with governance, to transparently discharge their official responsibilities. It ensures good governance and strengthens the political set up. In spite of facing innumerable challenges and showing unsatisfactory performance, Pakistanis has the capability to emerge as a democratic and progressive nation. Pakistan can road to democracy with dedication, determination, commitment, courage and patriotism of its political leaders. If they are aptly inculcated with the true spirit of democracy, they are potent enough to change the destiny.

There is no second opinion that democracy is pre-requisite for Pakistan to earn a respectable place in the international community. Its track record during 62 years of existence portrays a gloomy picture. The current challenges and threats further aggravate the scene. But this does no imply there is no room for improvement. A glance at the history reveals that difficulties always appear in the life of surviving nations. But

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these adversities are proved blessing in disguise when these are faced gallantly. This moment becomes starting point in their journey towards success. It has all the potential to overcome the mountainous challenges; the required is unity, faith, discipline and guidance.

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