The future of democracy has been perhaps the most widely discussed topics in the intellectual circles of Pakistan over the last couple of years. Despite the country entering 70th year of its independence, the democratic system is still unable to take strong roots in the country.

**Factors Responsible for the Failure**

The country is still unable to enjoy the dividends of democracy being enjoyed by the masses in the Western countries. Needless to say, this inability is due to the fact that the socio-economic and political environment of the country is miserably replete with many factors which have played an overwhelming role in the failure of democracy to grow in
its true spirit, hence making the future of democracy in Pakistan bleak. The presence of irritants like troubled civil-military relations, complex inter-mingling of religion and politics coupled with deep-rooted religious extremism has contributed significantly to the weakening of the roots of democratic system in the country. Prevalence of corrupt leadership, dynastic politics, rampant poverty, and entrenched illiteracy has further added fuel to the fire as far as the evolution of democracy in the country is concerned.

Undoubtedly, these factors have resulted in dismal deficit of democratic norms and values in the society, which have, on one hand, nurtured the scourge of extremism to alarming extent; while on the other, they have given rise to the erosion of pluralism and coexistence in the society, adding to the miseries of ethnic and religious minorities. Besides, due to the weakening of democratic system, not only have the internal divisions and splits in the society been accentuated, but the major 53 areas of service delivery like education, health care, eradication of poverty and underdevelopment, employment opportunities, personal security against the threats from state agencies and extremist groups, and civic amenities are also in severe disrepair.

To be sure, the constant weakening of the democratic system in the country is not an overnight phenomenon. Instead, it is the upshot of a great deal of time. And, obviously, there are many factors which have played a significant role in destabilizing the democratic system in the country, hence making its future bleak.

**Military Role in Politics**

The presence of strong military with the history of destabilizing the civilian governments in the past is one of the dominant factors behind the failure of democracy in the country. There is no denying the fact that democracy cannot take roots in the country as far as the military is obsessed with the desire to step into the corridors of power to rule the country. Even a bird’s eye view of the history of Pakistan simply reveals the fact that whenever some general is about to retire from his military job, he manipulates to assume the ruling authority of the country by removing the democratically elected government from the seat of power on the charges of corruption. The fact that four military coups have taken place gives a great deal of strength to this view that military coup has become a routine rather than an anomaly in Pakistan. This tradition of military coups gives courage to the military to destabilize the democratic set-up in the country. There is no denying the fact that the conflict between
strong military and weak democratic set-up hangs like sword of Damocles’ on the political sphere. Hence, the possibility of occurrence of military takeover any time in Pakistan poses a grave threat to the development of democracy.

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Coupled with the threat of strong military, the inseparable mingling of religion and politics is one of the dominant factors behind the weak growth of democracy in the country. The Pakistani state has mixed religious beliefs and politics to such an extent that it has become impossible to separate the two. Historically speaking, such mingling is the result of entrance of religious parties in the political arena right after the inception of Pakistan.

Now, the religious political parties have acquired such extraordinary clout and power in the political sphere that they have become a formidable challenge to the non-religious political parties. These parties not only use sensitive religious issues for their own political gains, but also patronize the religious and militant outfits. Because of these parties’ stronghold in the political arena, radical clerics have become so strong that the government and the state machinery seem helpless before them. The Faizabad sit-in is an obvious example in this regard. Additionally, due to disastrous mingling of religion and politics, religious forces have got so powerful that they have got superiority over parliament, resulting in the continued acceptance of their interpretation of religion and the laws on religious and social issues. In fact, they have reduced the space for any debate on these issues within and outside parliament. In this way, parliament has been rendered so ineffective by the religious political parties and extremist groups that there is a dire need of logical and rational debates on the major political and social issues facing the country. Briefly speaking, weak and ineffective parliament coupled with mingling of religion and politics is a great hurdle to the growth of democratic system in this country.

**Religion and Politics**

In addition to the mixing of religion and politics, rise of religious extremism equally poses a serious threat to the development of the democratic system in the country. Extremism is so entrenched in the society that religious extremists blatantly commit acts of violence in the society. Suicide attacks on public places, government security agencies, educational institutions and shrines are so common that people have lost...
faith in government's capacity to provide them security. It would not be wrong to say that extremism has put the government’s credibility at stake, hence, jeopardizing the future of democracy in the country.

Dynastic System in Politics

Another great hindrance to the development of the democracy is the prevalence of the dynastic system in the politics. Since the inception of Pakistan, the political culture has been the personal domain of certain well-renowned families. They have never allowed any ordinary person to be part of their political parties. Due to entrenched dynastic politics in the country, political parties have become personal fiefdoms of the politicians who are obsessed with controlling everything from the top.

There is no denying that such anti-democratic trend is a symptom of monarchy rather than democracy. It has not only marred the true spirit of democracy, but it is also a huge impediment to the development of democratic institutions and values in the country. Quite hand in hand with the dynastic political system, the undemocratic behaviour of the politicians is also responsible for weak evolution of democratic values in the country. It is a sad truth that the political leaders have miserably failed to promote the values of democracy in true spirit. They rarely manifest the democratic values in management of the affairs of the political system. In other words, there is an alarming dearth of democratic norms of restraint, moderation and mutual accommodation through consultation in the prevailing political system. Democracy only exists in slogans of the politicians who use democracy as a tool to perpetuate their rule in the country, hence accentuating political status quo. Any challenge to their rule is described by them as an anti-democratic behaviour. It is a fact that no political and constitutional system becomes democratic only by labeling it democratic unless it is imbued with the spirit and essence of democratic norms and values.

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Aside from undemocratic behavior, the politicians who dominate the political scene usually lack moral character. They are just obsessed with the desire to have power. They never show such an attitude that could be conducive to the growth of democratic institutions. They always adopt the façade of sincere politicians before elections. They make sublime promises to the people of their constituency. However, once they are elected, they come up with their true selfishly corrupt faces. They start to do corruption...
on a massive scale. Such sort of degenerated character of politicians gives an opportunity to the military to step into the corridors of power by removing the elected government on the charges of corruption. Needless to say, the presence of corrupt politicians is a huge threat to the evolution of democracy in the country.

**Accountability Mechanism**

The fact that political environment is rife with corrupt politicians is further aggravated by the absence of a strong and ruthless accountability culture in the country. There are no two opinions on the fact that ruthless and indiscriminate accountability is a vibrant tool to ensure the supremacy of law. However, Pakistan has not been fortunate enough to have such accountability mechanism. The accountability culture is so weak that the accountability of rulers and their immediate families seems a figment of the imagination. Due to weak accountability, the members of the families of ruling politicians are seen exploiting the official position of their parents or guardians to their financial and business benefit. Needless to say, such trend has given a severe blow to the rule of law in the country, leading to the erosion of public faith on the democratic system.

Deep-rooted feudalism is equally responsible for failure of democracy to take strong roots in the country. Since its very inception, Pakistan has been suffering from the disease of feudalism. These feudal, on one hand, contribute towards increase in the rate of poverty by keeping the people of their areas in utterly hopeless conditions; while on the other, they crush the true spirit of democracy in the pursuit of their unscrupulous desires. Feudalism is so ingrained in the society that it has abysmally curtailed the likelihood of common man to enter the political arena. Resultantly, parliament is replete with the feudal. They cannot be called true representatives of common people because considering them representatives of common masses is synonymous with viewing wolves as representatives of sheep. They have no concern for the interests of common masses but power. Briefly speaking, feudalism is a great threat to the growth of democracy. So far as these feudal are present in the county, democracy cannot grow in its true spirit.

**Poverty and Illiteracy**
Social ills like illiteracy and poverty also contribute significantly to weakening democratic norms in the country. No doubt, these evils have been sucking the blood of Pakistani society since the beginning of Pakistan. These ills dominate the society to such an extent that majority of masses are trapped in the net of poverty and illiteracy. There is no escaping the fact that the system of democracy relies heavily on educated society for its proper evolution, where people perceive the worth of democratic values, where people are aware of the real importance of elections. Unfortunately, in Pakistani society where most of the masses are not sure if they would have two meals a day, it would be silly and illogical to expect them to care for democratic values. Thus, it is really hard for the plant of democracy to grow properly in presence of social diseases of poverty and illiteracy.

The role of the interference of foreign hands, especially the USA, cannot be denied as far as a weakening of democratic norms in the country is concerned. It has never given rise to such efforts that could prove conducive for the growth of democracy in Pakistan. It has always been at the forefront to reinforce the undemocratic elements in Pakistan, causing great damage to the development of democracy in the country. If Pakistan has seen most of its period under the dictators, the role of the USA is also undeniable in this regard. Dictators have remained recipients of huge amounts of American aid throughout the history of the country.

**Intolerance and Political Culture**

In addition to foreign meddling, the fact that the political culture in Pakistan is imbued with degenerated political norms has also exacerbated the scenario with respect to the growth of democracy in the country. Diseased traditions like horse-trading, floor crossing, nasty opposition, haughty attitudes and political intolerance dominate the political culture. In truly democratic countries, opposition plays a healthy role to promote democratic values. It never hesitates to appreciate those policies of the ruling party which ensure national integrity or promote public welfare. But unfortunately, the opposition in Pakistan is bent on criticizing the policies of the government, no matter how constructive they are. In the presence of such diseased political norms, democratic values cannot be propagated on proper lines.

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Although the abovementioned factors have made the prospects of democracy highly bleak in the country, but there have emerged some optimistic trends over the last couple of years, which provide a ray of hope with respect to the future of democracy in the country. It would be quite appropriate to take into account these trends in order to have a better view of the scenario.

Most important of such trends is the emergence of free media in the country. Needless to say, the freedom of media is linked with the growth of democracy. Both depend on each other for their healthy growth. Not only has media won its freedom, but it also has realized its true rule to promote the true spirit of democracy in Pakistan. The active participation of media in the political culture of the country is also favorable for the evolution of democracy in its true spirit.

Not only has media won its freedom, so has done the judiciary. In the past, the judiciary was always led by dictatorial regimes as a tool to legitimate their rule. They used it as a puppet to serve their undemocratic designs. But now the situation has changed altogether. After a long period of drowsiness, the judiciary has at last awakened to play its true rule. It has resolved not to allow any steps which could mar its independent spirit. The Supreme Court is often seen taking suo motu notice of different issues arising due to the negligence of the government. Above all, the removal of Nawaz Sharif from the office in the wake of Panama Leaks by the apex court is a sign of independence of the judiciary in the country. Undoubtedly, this sign will go a long way to promote the development of democracy in this country.

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Recently, it has been seen that the civil society has also raised its voice in favour of democracy. Lawyers, doctors and different social organizations, and human rights, activists are usually seen protesting against the undemocratic behavior of the government. Lawyers’ movement for the independence of judiciary some years ago is, no doubt, an indication of the emergence of civil society. Thus, the awakening of the civil society is a healthy sign which is quite conducive to the development of democracy in this country.

There has also been seen a massive change in the attitude of the intelligentsia. They are no longer willing to welcome the undemocratic regime. The columnists, writers, etc. have come to the forefront in order to maximize the elements which can contribute
greatly to making the prospects of democratic system bright in this country. To be sure, the role of the intelligentsia in the formulation of the public opinion cannot be denied. Change in the patience of intelligentsia means change in public opinion. No doubt, such change will lead to the creation of environment quite productive for the growth of democracy.

The rapid growth of urbanization is equally a healthy change. Urbanization and awareness of democracy mostly run parallel to each other. Rapid growth in urbanization answer to rapid increase in the awareness of the democratic system. With increase in urbanization, there will be increase in the employment opportunities, media access and her rights awareness. This all will create an environment quite conducive to the growth of democracy. Last but not the least, emergence of professional approach on behalf of the military is an indication of bright change in military’s approach towards politics. Recognizing its parameters, military has decided to promote the democratic system. Military’s commitment to eliminate the militant outfits, and appearance of current army chief in the Serate to brief the senators about the development of ongoing security operations in the country are the signs which point to the bright future of democracy in Pakistan.

Conclusion

All the discussion drives us to the conclusion that despite the lapse of seven decades, the democratic system has failed to take strong roots in the country. Its evolution has been jeopardized by many factors. Most prominent among them are strained civil-military relations, complex inter-mingling of religion and politics along with the presence of deep-rooted religious extremism, rampant poverty and illiteracy, lack of integrity among the politicians and the dynastic political system. Needless to say, these factors have made the country falter on road to viable democracy and sustained political development. However, the situation is not out of control yet. If measures like massive investment in the education sector, initiation of development projects in the poverty-stricken areas, elimination of irritants hindering gender parity in the society, and above all unflinching political commitment on the part of politicians to promote democratic norms and practices in the country coupled with the promotion of ruthless and non-selective accountability culture reinforcing rule of law are taken with dedication, undoubtedly they will go a long way to make Pakistan a successful democratic country in the world.
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