Liberal Democracy in Context of Pakistan And Bangladesh

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to understand the democracy and the challenges towards liberal democracy. Desk review and thorough document analysis have been used to dig out the challenges for liberal democracy. Politically liberal democracies are contextualized and more flexible, assure the freedom of speech and enable voters for alternatives in case of incapable governments. The central view of liberal democracy is that every citizen must be treated on an equal basis. Pakistan and Bangladesh (separated from Pakistan in 1971) are the democratic republic countries by constitutional arrangements. The political system of both countries is based upon the elected people and then the elected people generate further policies, rules, laws, and regulations for governing the system in states. Theoretically, both states consist of governments, political parties, and official apparatus of military and civil society organizations. However, historically both countries remained unable to continue the democratic systems due to recurrent involvement and intervention by the military, undemocratic institutions, terrorism and extremism, political disorder, and uncertainty from their inception.

Keywords: Constitution, Democratic values, Institutions, Liberal democracy, Political System, Terrorism, Tolerance

1 Introduction

Democracy is a most discussed concept but still most misused and misunderstood when military regimes, single party, and dictators claim the support for democracy at the same time. Despite continuing challenges the democratic regimes carry on to develop and flourish in the whole world. The word democracy derives from the Greek word demos, which is a type of government in which supreme powers are vested in hands of people. In the world, the concept of democracy can be exercised by people in a direct way or by representatives. Former president Abraham Lincoln explained democracy; it is the government of people, by people and for people. Democracy is a set of principles regarding freedom and liberty. It is not just the product of governmental institutions but it relates to norms, values, practices, and attitudes variously in societies of the world. The base of democracy is not the uniform practices but on fundamental principles.

In a liberal democracy, the word liberal does not mean that such a democratic government implies the theory of liberalism. Liberalism is used as a reference to the initial structure for modern liberal democracy that was introduced during the period of Enlightenment for advocacy of liberty. In the sequel, the philosophers emphasized the individual right for asserting resistance if authorities consider individuals as a subject. Presently, different political ideologies like conservatism, social democracy, etc support liberal democracy. Significantly liberal democracy considers constitutionalism as the supreme power. In a liberal democracy, the constitution explains the democratic nature of the state. Purposely the constitution asserts the limitations on the government.
authority. The American perspective speaks about the powers separations between governmental pillars including an accountability system and an independent judiciary. Democracies in Europe emphasize the principle of rule of law. Despite context variations, governments have to exercise as per the principles of constitutions and enforced them according to the publicly accepted and established laws. Numerous democracies adopt the model of vertically separated powers structure to avoid the abuse and misuse of powers.

In pluralists’ perspective by establishing the inclusive institutions, a power-sharing mechanism based on consensus, guaranteeing them equal rights all people regardless of any differences. The democratic systems build institutional arrangements to protect the rights of ignored segments of society. In a democratic system, the government serves the role of a connecting network among various private, public, groups, and individuals. This type of mixture is said pluralism. In a democratic setup, the authorities of government are clearly defined and limited by law. Many associations, groups, or organizations perform freely without the control of the government. Principally democracies are there to serve in the best interest of society and the status of people consider as citizens, not as a subject of the state. In a democratic political system, the state's prime responsibility is to provide safety to people and protect their rights so, in turn, people give their loyalty to the state. In contrast, the authoritarian political system without serving the people demands loyalty from them.

1.1 Historical Perspective of Pakistan and Bangladesh

Historically for creating a Muslim state the struggle was initiated by secular Muslim elites from united India. In the British legacy, Pakistan inherited severe challenges for creating the secular state. At the inception stage, Pakistan consisted of two parts of the land; one West Pakistan and the other was East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). Both parts of the country were different in every respect as result there was tension between both of them. Apart from several challenges, the biggest challenge was to create harmony among the people of both wings to create a nation. The Islamists segment of society created its image at a broader level among the people of Pakistan. There was no other so motivating and potential ideology for unifying people in Pakistani polity except the Islamist view. In this paper the term Islamist is used as; a person who believes that the Islamic law must be above the state law and constitutional arrangements will be independent and empowered to review any un-Islamic law at any stage. The Islamists considered Islamists without the interpretation of whether is liberal or illiberal.

After partition, in Pakistan, the Islamists (liberal & illiberal) voices were recognized with popular support but illiberal Islamists did not articulate their voices with one voice. Islamists groups presented an interpretation of Islam and most of them subscribed as traditionalists. Hence the traditionalists speculated that only trained scholars affiliated with the scholarly union can do interpretation and review of Islamic principles. Such scholars posited the interpretations of Islamic principles in combating the liberal notions of the West. Other Islamists groups posited the different notions about the interpretation of Islamic principles that they can do better review and interpretations as compared to traditionalists. Other groups specifically Jamat e Islami was in view with a modified version of the current structure of government. Jamat e Islami proposed the governmental structure as with the existing setup of government with the addition of constitution supremacy in terms of making alignment of laws with Islamic principles. So that proposal emerged to present a comprising offer to elites of Pakistan. Hence, Islamists would preserve the constitution to guarantee the consistency of all laws with Islamic principles. However, in the early 50s, the mistrust between the Islamists and secular liberals was grown up after the Islamist violence against the sect of Islam Ahmadis. In 1952, traditionalists and Jamat e Islami declared the Ahmedi sect as
heretical and demanded the government to ban the doctrine of the Ahmedi sect which was led by Molana Mudodi but the government denied it as result some Islamist parties’ commenced violence. So the political unrest and discontent were staged at the broader level which led to destructive uprisings in many parts of the country. In 1954, the order re-established and a court report regarding the disturbances was produced which reflected that the Islamic notion seemed the most powerful tool to motivate the people of Pakistan. Further, it presented that the illiberal pose of Islam was more convincing as compared to liberal ones which indicated that the acceptance for liberal aspects was acceptable for people of Pakistan. The supports of theocracy processed the amalgamation of misunderstanding and misconception to curve their position in the political system of Pakistan. Historically, the political system faced a military takeover four times in Pakistan. From 1700 – 1947, Bangladesh was the first colony of British rule in South Asia where democracy was introduced. At that time the democracy was of Westminster style which was practiced in Britain. East Pakistan now known as Bangladesh separated from West Pakistan hence Bangladesh got its independence in 1971. The parliamentary democratic system was introduced as a political system for the country but military coups curtailed democratic pattern by imposing martial laws. So in Bangladesh, the journey of democracy was not remained smooth due to several certain reasons.

Hence democratic setup could not flourish rapidly. Hamza Alvi presented the concept of an over-developed state in which he said that there is a general trend for acquiring the authoritarian role and military control in different regimes including the economically developed groups. Even though the administrative pillar of the political system is placed against them it concurrently maintains their interests. In such a situation dominant group even the progressive class cannot hold rule. In its place, one gets considerable control of power on the economically dominant group by the military and even by civil bureaucracy. As per Alvi, the fragile position of democracy in Pakistan and Bangladesh correlates between the military and weaker democratic institutions.

2 Concept of Liberal Democracy

The framework of liberal democracy consists of various common premises that allow a broad series of institutional arrangements to organize a democratic polity.

2.1 Liberal Democracy as a Universal Value

As per autocrats, liberal democracy is the type of governing model which was developed in European countries during the enlightenment era. Hence this model cannot be easily transferable to other parts of the world due to multiculturalism. Hence they criticized the attempts of democratic governments in promoting democracy in other parts of the world as a cultural impediment. This criticism of commentators is not much convincing as other objects were being transferred/transported from one country to another countries. The authoritarian leaders (political or religious clergies) rejected liberal democracy that this model was developed in a specific context so it could not practice in various cultural entities but the fact is that they want to preserve their power. The number of democratic principles like human dignity, freedom of speech, equality before the law, tolerance, and justice, etc is not only part of European cultures but also many other nations' values, culture, and religion. Hence the democratic elements, values, and principles are almost universal. The prerequisite of democracy is the equality of all human beings which pursue the dignity of human beings. So it is clear that the religions that believe in natural inequalities would not agree with the prerequisite principle of democracy. But in the case of Pakistan and Bangladesh, both countries are Muslim and Islam emphasizes the equality of all human beings and looks forward to the dignity of a human.
Determinants of liberal democracy- Structure versus Culture

Seymour Martin Lipset social requisites of democracy (1959) presented a relation between socioeconomic structure and democracy, in which he argued that democracies grow in educated and well economically societies. But in this regard, his arguments remained contentious. Firstly the relationship between democracy and socio-economic structure is not logical that some highly developed countries like Japan and Germany did not adopt the democratic setup earlier while in comparison the countries with low economic status adopted democratic setup relatively earlier like India. Hence there are some other specific factors of each country due to which democracy could not flourish.

2.2 Liberal Democracy – Institutional Arrangements

Largely the concept of liberal democracy is linked up with the policies, practices, and institutions of the United States. While on the other hand, the foreign policy of the United States is dissatisfied due to the intervention of other states matters in the world, hence it has influenced the notion of liberal democracy, especially in the developing countries. In some cases, the principles, values, and elements of liberal democracy have been misinterpreted and misunderstood in developing countries and their dictatorial leaderships also try to keep it that way. The democratic aspirants have various institutional arrangements due to which they become able to develop a constitutional rule according to their context of countries.

The institutional arrangements give choices for the governmental setup which suits best to each country based on three fundamentals. Firstly, it gives choice between a presidential or a parliamentary system. In a parliamentary system, the electoral system makes the executive body accountable to the legislative body and can be removed from power by the system of the vote of no confidence. While in the presidential systems, the legislative body and chief executive are elected through separate elections for a fixed period. Both systems (parliamentary & presidential) pose merits and demerits as well. The stability in both systems depends upon the willingness of key political stakeholders. Thus the democracy assumes a consensus among all the actors and stakeholders of a polity. Secondly, the institutional arrangements give choice regarding the electoral system. It provides the choice between majority or plurality for constituencies with single-member and proportional representations. The third most important aspect of institutions is given choice between the degree of centralized governmental power or the degree of autonomy given to the federating units. The vertical power structure is found in the federal system. This system is appropriate for culturally diverse and large societies like Pakistan, India, and the USA, etc as it accommodates the various ethnic segments to handle their internal matters without any interference. In an entity as people choose to live according to a constitutional structure, which may be practiced in different ways. In the world, some of the democracies practice unitary administrations while others practice the federal governmental setup. For example, Pakistan, the US, and many more are federal republicans with states/provinces which have their legal system and governmental independent setup at the center.

It is fact that above mentioned institutional options opens up a multitude of institutional choices. Furthermore, the liberal democracies also vary at large according to the social, economic, and political culture and system. According to the cultural aspect, each country adopts the mode of decision making whether it be majoritarian or consensual. In Pakistan and Bangladesh, there is a parliamentary system in which the choice of the individual is articulated based on majoritarian consensus to protect the individual rights which ultimately leads to democracy.
3  Key Characteristics of Liberal Democracy

Democracy is the political system of government through which all citizens directly/indirectly exercised civic responsibility and power. It is the phenomena of set principles based on the rule of the majority and individual rights. Democratic pattern asserts the decentralized power structure and triggers the down to top approach. According to democracy, the political institutions and system must be easily accessible, approachable, and responsive. This system protects the rights of individuals with all respect at all levels. Regardless of differences free and fair electoral system ensures by democracies. Democracies not give rights to individuals but also give responsibilities to citizens for the protection of their freedom and liberty. Democracies enforce the acceptable and tolerated culture among the citizens. As per Mahatma Gandhi, tolerance empowers democracy and intolerance is a form of violence. In democratic political systems of all types of democracies, the political decisions are made based on majority rule but itself it is not democratic automatically. For example, a system in the name of majority rule with fifty-one percent of the population suppresses or oppresses the rest forty-nine percent population cannot be called fair. As per the democratic pattern, the majority must be attached for guaranteeing the rights of all individuals. All democracies characterize the minority rights and majority rule irrespective of cultural and political history.

3.1  Fundamental Rights

The relationship between the state and people is fundamental in way of democracy. As per the words of the Declaration of independence of the US, all individuals are born equal and with certain rights by the Creator. So the governments are established to secure the rights of people. Particularly in democracies, the fundamental rights include freedom of religion, freedom of assembly, freedom of mobility, freedom of speech and expression, and right of equality before rule of law. These all rights are ensured by the democratic system and all citizens enjoy all these provided rights by the state. Regarding the socio-political issues, freedom of speech and expression is considered the key aspect of democracy. The fabric of democracies depends upon the participation of the knowledgeable and informed citizenry. The accessibility to information by citizens enables them for involvement in public life and question to oppressive policies/practices of governments.

3.2  Religious Freedom and Tolerance

In democracies, all people are free in their religious practices. It includes the right of worship and practices variedly without feelings of oppression from any group or institute of society. Similarly, another human fundamental right, the freedom of religion is not granted by the state yet all democratic systems secure this right. Although several democracies are secular they protect religious rights in all respect. The true and meaningful democracies assert a claim for the protection of individual religious differences and religious choices, even in the case of the particular religion of a state. Hence the religion is practiced in the context of a particular democratic society. It is fact that individuals exercise their fundamental rights but these rights do not function out of the society, these all are exercise as per outlines of society. The democratic system protects the rights of individuals hence the citizens strengthen the society by undertaking their civic responsibilities.

3.3  Free and Fair Elections

The foundations of democratic politics, free and elections are significant to assure the consent of citizens. The electoral system performs as a prime system for reflecting the assent into the authority of government. The democratic elections are inclusive, competitive, and viable elections in which the leaders are elected by people in turn citizens enjoy the freedom of criticism on government and
also give better alternatives. As elections are inclusive, all adults enjoy the opportunity of participation on a franchise basis.

3.4 Rule of Law

Rule of law protects the rights of citizens and provide safety in the socio-economic and political aspect of all citizens in a democratic system. Under the umbrella of rule of law, all citizens are equal before the law regardless of color, status, creed, and ethnic identity. In democracies, people willingly obey the laws of the state as they deem the citizens oriented laws and policies. By obeying the laws willingly, justice is achievable in the best way.

3.5 Constitutions - Supreme Law

The constitution of any country elaborates the fundamental parameters of society to establish the wellbeing of common people. In a state, all people including leaders are supposed to subject to that nation's state. The constitution provides the guarantee for the fundamental rights of humans and asserts the procedures for government in favor of citizens. Constitutions signify and recognize the government with a clear limitation of power. In a governmental system, all policies and laws must be well written in compliance with the constitution. In a democratic setup, an independent judiciary plays role in assuring the accordance of laws and powers of government with the constitution. The constitution of a country provides foundations and frameworks for judicial decisions, actions of leaders, and practices in a setup.

3.6 Pillars of Democracy

As noted earlier, citizens grant powers as per law to their leaders, elected through a free and fair process. So the authority of government is divided in a constitutional democratic system to ensure transparency and best utilization of national resources. In a democratic setup, the government structure is divided into three pillars as legislature initiates laws, the executive implements these laws, and the judiciary functions in compliance with the law with the constitution.

Apart from mentioned pillars of democracy, free and independent media, political parties/groups, and other associations play a key role in operating and protecting democratic values.

4 Challenges to Liberal Democracy in Pakistan and Bangladesh

Constitutionally Pakistan is a democratic parliamentary political system based upon an elected type of governance. Federal governmental setup is being practiced through which the distribution of powers and responsibilities are delegated on a proportional basis. The governmental system is based on the separation of powers among the pillars of government. Laws are instated for the superior role of political institutions in the state. Although the political system of Pakistan comprises the characteristics of liberal democracy but there certain issues that hampered the process of a liberal democratic setup. On the other hand, the political system of Bangladesh is based on the structure of parliamentary representative democracy. A unitary governmental setup is being practiced over there.

Democracy in both countries is facing many challenges. This paper will elaborate on the major challenges.

1) The first major challenge is that Pakistan inherited structural imbalances from the colonized period and same like transitioned to Bangladesh. The imbalances are integrated into the basis of military and civil bureaucratic institutions which led to weakening the political institutions. In united India, the British rule developed strong military and civil bureaucracy
because they were concerned to develop effective administrative and defense system. So in the context of British rule, the emphasized institutions; civil bureaucracy, and military were not committed to democratic setup due to historical bases. Both institutions were not established to serve the society largely but for the protection of colonial interests.

2) The second major challenge is that both countries have autocratic nature of political institutions. Historically, both countries political systems faced recurrent military involvement and interventions in their political systems. Due to the geopolitical position of Pakistan and Bangladesh, the military enjoys more power as compared to civil governments.

3) The third major challenge is that both countries are facing terrorism and extremism. In Pakistan, religious intolerance and terrorism were increased in the late 70s while Bangladesh is facing this issue from its inception. Consequently, several incidents were happened in the name of religious perspectives like suicide attacks and intra sects’ conflicts and due to the war on terror. Hence this entire situation leads to instability and uncertainty in both countries as result democratic institutions could not flourish.

4) Forth challenge towards liberal democracy is violence and corruption. War of powers and clash of interest among the leaders and authorities curtailed liberal democracy. These issues do not allow democracy and democratic institutions to flourish and grow.

The detail of the above-mentioned challenges are as below,

4.1 Structural Imbalances

The imbalances are integrated into the basis of military and civil bureaucratic institutions which led to weakening the political institutions. In the Pakistani political setup, the British legacy is reflected. In united India, the British rule developed strong military and civil bureaucracy because they were concerned to develop effective administrative and defense system. British rule controlled Indians with force to stable their rule in the country. So in the context of British rule, the emphasized institutions; civil bureaucracy, and military were not committed to democratic setup due to historical bases. Both institutions were not established to serve the society largely but for the protection of colonial interests. Based on their foundations, they manifested politics as an inefficient, corrupt, and disorder approach to managing societal affairs in comparison they have sown seeds of thoughts that they are transparent, efficient, and rational in their affairs. Apart from this, the politicians being corrupt will undermine the capacity of the military and bureaucracy therefore no one would be allowed to interfere with the functions of both institutions. It was the moral obligation of the military to overthrow the civil governments or politicians if found involved in threatening the solidarity of the nation. As result, political institutions could not flourish and become weaker. So the weaker position of political institutions paved an easy way for military and bureaucracy to be strong and obtain their inherited colonial position play role as rulers in the political system. Democratic political institutions have actualized their inferior role so usually military influenced major decisions in politics and took control four times of government in the history of Pakistan. Pakistani history reflects that after the military, the civil bureaucracy also exercised powers in the political setup in juxtaposition with the military. In recent decades the power of bureaucracy declined somehow due to certain reasons. So military and bureaucracy impacted the growth of political institutions generally but specifically both have affected the independence of the judiciary. The political institutions were put in the subordination of the military to limit participatory politics. The duration (1958-1969, 1977-1985 & 1999-2008) reflects the military dominating role in the political system under the umbrella of law with the support of the judiciary in Pakistan. In a democratic setup, the judiciary is considered the third pillar of the
state system. In Pakistan, the role of the judiciary remained as an ax to grind for the authoritarian and military leaders. In a democratic setup, the true role of the judiciary is to safeguard the constitution, rule of law, interpretation of the constitution, equality, and protection of individuals' rights. Judiciary could not play its role independently, its independence was curtailed by using various approaches for instance appointment of like-minded judges, hierarchal adjustments of courts, and constitutional amendments. This third tier provided legal and constitutional provisions to strengthen the authoritarian and military setups. In Pakistan, the judiciary served the interests of the military in 1958, 1969, 1979, and 1999 through legal provisions. Judiciary supported military regimes through the doctrine of necessity and extra-constitutional amendments. During every four military regimes, there was the insecurity of tenure of judges. They were at the arm of military administrators and could be out from their positions. In 2008, the lawyers' movement for judiciary restoration was a critical turning point in the history of the judiciary. Further, subsequent judicial activism enabled the position of the judiciary to engage in a standoff with military and civil government on key issues.

4.2 Autocratic Nature of Political Institutions

In Pakistan the nature of democracy is mixed. There are numbers of challenges in way of democracy but certain institutions like political parties, judiciary, media, and legislatures played role in the continuation of democracy. All institutions contributed positively to the survival of democracy. On the other hand, history witnessed the repeated military controls of governmental machinery which cripple down the growth and maturity of political institutions. Moreover, the constitution provides a stable framework for a deliberative democratic system but Pakistan faced uphill challenges in constitutional development. The repeated breakdown and disregard in constitutionalism signify the fragility in its development. For decades the parliamentary systems experienced frequent dissolution and re-establishment in vandalize form, so political institutions could not find a way to mature. In its history, the parliaments at the national level cripple down ten times while only two times transferred powers successfully. These drawbacks led to instability and flux in the politics of the country. The insecurity and aloofness from politics of people created gray room in elections turn-out. The federating units suffered more fragility in the dissolution of assemblies as compared to national level assemblies. The ruling personals practiced the democratic face by using the lawmaking institutions instead to allow them to flourish for democratic values.

In the political history of Pakistan, the leaderships particularly the authoritarian rulers did not entertain the legitimacy of political opposition. It is vitally clear that the legitimacy of opposition plays a key role in flourishing the democratic setup in the political system. The last decade witnessed the civilian transition but still, the acceptance of tolerance towards opposition is not there. The opposition party is usually victimized by the ruling party by imposing legal charges against their leaders and in turn the opposition use agitations by mass against the ruling party/leaders. The same set-up is recurrent as the opposition takes control of powers and the ruling party goes at the opposition level. Consequently, there is a decline in election turnout due to repeated inconsistency and unpredictability in the behavior of political parties. Hence it can be said that even of the fact political institutions exist now and precedent existed institutions remained fragile and feeble. Historically, Pakistan lacks political culture and democratic values hence the political institutions could not function as an independent force. Besides, a clash of interests among the state institutions, classes, and individuals collapses the political institutions in Pakistan.

4.3 Terrorism and Extremism

Both countries Pakistan and Bangladesh face the issues of religious intolerance from the inception. In Pakistan, religious intolerance was increased during the 70s among the people and groups. Later
on, the war on terror impacted the tolerance culture towards religion adversely after the 9/11 incident. The last two decades witnessed the escalation of instability, insecurity, and political violence in both countries especially in Pakistan consequently Pakistan's role as a frontline state in the war on terror globally. In return, both countries are paying a huge price of war being hybrid regimes. The literature demonstrates a strong link and relationship between terrorism and democracy, as hybrid and developing political systems experienced terrorist attacks at higher levels while more established and developed political systems experienced less. After the incident of 9/11 terrorist attacks increased in undemocratic, conflicted, and under military occupied countries. Pakistan and Bangladesh experienced the same pattern hence democracy could not flourish on a liberal basis.

5  Conclusion

The above discussion and explanations depict that the liberal democracy model-based numerous shared premises. This model allows for a variety of choices regarding institutionalism to manage a democratic entity. This reflects that the model of liberal democracy can be practiced by various countries in the world despite having a diversity of cultural aspects. The model of liberal democracy is based upon the general values, elements, and principles.

The history of both countries witnessed the dominant role of state institutions on the political institutions. Both countries struggled for a democratic setup but still, liberal democracy could not consolidate. This is due to key issues including delays in constitutional arrangements, a curtailed independent judiciary, an underdeveloped party system, unfair electoral practices, military involvement in politics, and intolerant culture.

In this decade number of political developments happened in both countries which paved way for liberal democracy. Such as gradual aloofness of military from political systems, steps for judiciary independence, constitutional amendments to empower parliaments and federating units, and political socialization among people. However, still, milestones are there to be achieved for consolidating liberal democracy which depends upon the approaches to address religious and ethnic aspects, economic crisis, and disparities in the countries.

Currently, the age is of democratic values which are not only on the agenda of academia but are also goals of the foreign policy of international institutions. Huge capital was spent yearly to promote the rule of law for equitable treatment for every citizen under the concept of liberal concept. A point to ponder is that how the rule of law can be promoted in secular illiberal and some Islamic type of governance.

Reference


