



# THE FUTURES OF DEMOCRACY IN PAKISTAN

A liberal perspective

**Inayatullah, Sarah Inayatullah and Sohail Inayatullah**

**Due to the domination of state institutions over political institutions, Pakistan has not experienced a steady consolidation of democracy over its fifty year history. This is manifest in the lack of roots of constitutionalism, the absence of fully autonomous judiciary, a well developed party system and regularly held fair elections. Recent political developments such as the gradual withdrawal of state institutions particularly the military from the political arena, greater assertiveness of the judiciary, parliaments' curtailment of president powers and rising political consciousness among the people have brightened the chances of survival of democracy in the country. Its further consolidation will depend on the capacity of elected leaders to address the serious problems of ethnic and religious dissensions, financial vulnerability, heavy indebtedness, skyrocketing inflation and serious economic disparities. © 1997 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved**

The recent 1997 fair elections in Pakistan, the introduction of the 13th amendment depriving the President of several powers including that of the dismissal of the National Assembly, the continuing commitment to democracy by the most significant and powerful groups and organisations and the existence of formal institutions associated with liberal

Inayatullah is a retired United Nations Researcher. His academic interests include theory of ethnicity, democracy in Pakistan, development of social sciences in Pakistan and elections in Pakistan. Sarah Inayatullah recently finished her M.Phil from Quaid-i-Azam University. They can be reached at: 3, ST. 18, F. 7.2, Islamabad, Pakistan (email: [Inayat@bazzm.sdnpk.undp.org](mailto:Inayat@bazzm.sdnpk.undp.org)). Sohail Inayatullah is a frequent contributor to *Futures* and in 1992 guest edited a special issue of *Futures* on the futures of South Asia. He can be reached at The Communication Centre, Queensland University of Technology, Box 2434, Brisbane, Queensland, 4001, Australia (Tel: +61 7 3864 2192; fax: +61 7 3864 1813; email: [s.inayatullah@qut.edu.au](mailto:s.inayatullah@qut.edu.au)).

democracy are not sure and true indicators of democracy's bright future in Pakistan. The long and repeated military rules and frequent breakdowns of democratic order suggest how fragile is the plant of democracy in Pakistan. Neither, however, do the past failures and the current inadequacies of the democratic system necessarily suggest that the country is doomed to have an authoritarian system to counter its drift to anarchy and that the democratic option for it is closed for ever. Pakistani society is pregnant with both democratic and authoritarian potentialities. Which one of them is realised depends upon the internal dynamics of the development of Pakistani society and polity and its relationship to the world order.

An earlier piece on the futures of Pakistan focused on the images of the future pulling Pakistan.<sup>1</sup> These included: the **Islamic socialist** image of 'roti, kapra, makan' (bread, clothes and housing); the **original** meaning of Pakistan as the land of the pure and the moral, a safe home for Muslims—the mythic image of the perfect Muslim polity guided by the words and deeds of the prophet of Islam; Pakistan as an emerging developing nation, moving quickly to middle-income status by following the East Asian model of a **disciplined authoritarian capitalist** society; the **loss of its sovereignty**—the fear of the breakdown of the nation externally through military takeover by India or culturally through media penetration from the West; and, **No Change** or the continuation of the Grand disillusionment—a loss of faith in all institutions and leaders, a feeling of failure as a people with the only rational act that of leaving the country for anywhere.

This article is concerned less with the pull of futures and more with the push of history, on the processes and factors creating the future of Pakistan, particularly creating a democratic Pakistan. The perspective taken is guided by a liberal theory of the State, in which competing interests ensure pluralism and do not allow any one institution to dominate.

### **The state of democracy in Pakistan**

To understand the futures of democracy in Pakistan, seven criteria are used in the present analysis. They are:

1. The progressive movement of political institutions and processes toward a democratic model based on the rule of law, equality of civic status and guarantee of basic human freedoms.
2. Changes in the structural balance of power between state institutions and political institutions.
3. The emergence of a pluralist political community or nation in which major material and ideological divisions are reduced to the minimum through a process of accommodation, compromise and tolerance and by continuously empowering and incorporating the disadvantaged gender, social groups and classes and cultural, ethnic, and religious minorities into the political community on the basis of equality.
4. Continuous deepening of democratic norms and values in the society resulting in synergic and reinforcing relations between a democratic society and democratic polity.
5. Deepening of democracy from political and civic arenas to economic arenas wherein democracy is defined not just in terms of voting and even pluralism but in terms of access of the disadvantaged to participate in their economic, scientific and technologi-

cal futures—economic democracy including employed-owned businesses, for example.

6. Indigenous democracy in terms of creativity among Pakistanis to develop their own governance systems which reflect historical religious, cultural and epistemological commitments. This is partly about extending the democratic discourse to local ways of knowing.
7. Liberation of a society, a nation-state, from the constraints emerging from the world order which inhibit the development of its democratic potential.

We focus mostly on the first four factors and the last factor.

### **Democratisation of political institutions**

The record of democracy in Pakistan is mixed. Despite unfavourable environments some political institutions such as legislatures and political parties with some interruptions and restrictions have continued to exist. The Judiciary and the Press have also survived onslaughts from authoritarian regimes. All four institutions have made positive, though limited, contributions to the survival and functioning of democracy. However, recurrent military rules and other factors have occasionally debilitated them, depriving them of gaining full independence and maturity and realising their full potential.<sup>2</sup>

Pakistan has experienced severe difficulties in developing an agreed constitutional framework which can support the institutional edifice of democracy. At least five constitutions were drafted. Out of these three were promulgated. Only two of them, 1956 and 1973, enshrined the democratic spirit and only the latest has survived in a mutilated form. It has been amended several times. These amendments particularly those made during 1977 to 1986 have weakened the democratic character of the constitution. In particular, the 8th amendment enhanced and consolidated the powers of the President who could dismiss the National Assembly. With the introduction of 13th amendment some important democratic elements of the original 1973 constitution have been revived though several other undemocratic features remain unchanged. Consequently, now (1997) the Constitution commands relatively great support of major political parties and interest groups than was the case before this amendment. However, certain features of even the amended constitution such as separate electorate for minorities and lack of reserved seats for women, certain laws discriminatory against minorities and women continue to be resented by the affected groups. The frequent breakdown of constitutional order and strong tendency among the powerful groups to disregard the constitution on vital issues represent the weakness of constitutionalism—respect for the constitutional provision and voluntary and conscious adherence to both the letter and spirit of law in Pakistan.<sup>3</sup>

Having been frequently dissolved and re-established in a mutilated form, legislative institutions have failed to mature in Pakistan. The national parliament has been dissolved 10 times in its history—three times as a consequence of military coups, four times when the presidents with military or bureaucratic background invoked their powers for this purpose. Only two National Assemblies were dissolved to hold fresh elections. The powers and sovereignty of the National Assembly revived since 1986 were considerably circumscribed by the power of an indirectly elected president who could dissolve it. The Presidents used this power four times since 1988 when General Ziaul Haq dismissed the

Assembly elected in 1985. This frequent use of power of the President led to political instability and political apathy and cynicism in the country as evident from declining turnout during the last four elections. As no political party commanded the required two-third majority in the National Assemblies and lacked mutual trust they could not take away these powers of the President though each of the two major parties, PPP (Pakistan People's Party) and PML (Pakistan Muslim League), suffered twice from the use of this power. The Muslim League as a component of Islamic Democratic Alliance had such a majority but was not inclined to amend it to avoid the displeasure of the military establishment supporting the President. The Federal Shariat (based on Islamic law) Court's aggressive assertion of its powers and jurisdiction has further curtailed the powers of the National Assembly. The provincial assemblies have been more often dissolved than the National Assemblies on flimsy grounds. The rulers often use the legislative institutions to sustain them in power and maintain a democratic facade rather than allow them to perform their democratic functions of monitoring and controlling the executive.

The tendency to weaken the legislative institutions and reduce the sovereignty of parliament was strong until March 1997. During the period of the Caretaker government (5 November–16 February 1997), after President Leghari had dissolved Benazir Bhutto's government, Leghari made an attempt to further consolidate his powers. He sent a reference to Supreme Court concerning his powers to appoint judges of the higher courts. The Court did not give a favourable judgement. Then he created the Council for Defence and National Security (CDNS) by presidential proclamation to help co-ordinate national and strategic policies of the country. It consists of four army chiefs, the prime minister, and a few cabinet ministers to be presided over by the President. The formation of CDNS was questioned on several grounds; that it formalised the role of military in politics and made the president stronger than the prime minister. Its creation was defended on the ground that it would ensure continuity of democracy and stability of the country. The Council could prevent the use of Article (58)(2)b which has created political instability by prematurely terminating the tenure of the last four elected governments. It could also act as a safeguard against the imposition of military rule and permit the half-baked democratic system to function. The elections of 1997 which gave PML-N two third majority in the National Assembly changed the situation. On April 1, Muslim League Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif with the support of all political parties successfully steered the Thirteenth Amendment reducing the President to the titular head of the state. This has put the CDNS in cold storage and brightened the future of democracy in Pakistan particularly if the Prime Minister governs within the confines of constitution and law.<sup>4</sup>

However, history is not on the Prime Minister's side. During most of Pakistan's political history, Pakistani rulers have failed to accept the legitimacy of political opposition. Some religious quarters have even questioned the role of opposition in an 'Islamic polity' calling for rule by the pious, always assuming that their own brand of Islam is the correct one or that their own morality surpassed others.<sup>5</sup> The rulers, particularly the authoritarian ones, have not only questioned the legitimacy of the opposition and the role it can play in a democracy but undermined the growth of it through repressive measures including frequent levelling of the charges of treason and lack of patriotism. The transfer of power from one political party to another through an election accepted fair by the contestants has occurred rarely. In general, even though Pakistan has been democratic for the last 10 years, a political culture of tolerance for the opposition is absent. The government in power victimises the opposition, going to the extent of imprisoning their leaders, and the

opposition agitates to bring down the government, trying to rouse the people to cooperate with them. The same scenario is repeated when the opposition comes to power and government becomes the opposition. However, there is some evidence of people becoming tired of this erratic behaviour of political parties reflected in declining turnout in elections which may oblige the parties to change in positive direction. Some limited change is evidently occurring. The result of the 1993 elections were accepted by PML-N though later the party launched a movement to force the Benazir Bhutto government out. While Bhutto regards the 1997 elections as rigged, she has promised to cooperate with PML-N government and has not called for new elections nor launched any agitation movement. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif seems to be restrained in persecuting the opposition. These precedents might begin a culture of tolerance.

The country has yet to institutionalise fair elections, an important indicator of maturity of democracy. Only two out of 10 elections for national assemblies (held in 1970 and 1993) are generally accepted as fair; others are considered rigged to varying degrees. These two elections were conducted not by a ruling party but by relatively neutral caretaker governments. The opposition parties accepted the results of only these two elections. In other elections, they often launched agitation to overthrow governments elected in what they considered rigged elections. The opposition also boycotted elections of one national assembly (elected in 1985) and that of eight provincial assemblies. The opposition's charge of elections being rigged more often rings true. Two referendums held to 'elect' presidents, one in 1962 and one in 1984 were a blatant farce. The indirect 1965 Presidential elections were rigged by the incumbent president.<sup>6</sup>

Thus it can be concluded that though democratic political institutions exist in Pakistan now and occasionally have existed in the past they remain weak and fragile. A democratic political culture and strong political traditions have not developed to enable these institutions to function as an autonomous force. Whenever a crisis develops, emerging from a conflict between the authoritarian state institutions and dominant classes or due to conflict of interest between them, democratic institutions collapse.

### **Deep structural imbalances and the future of democracy**

The failure of Pakistani society to throw up a pro-democracy middle class, dislodge the feudals from political power, and transform the Pakistani polity through political movements is closely linked to the emergence of an imbalance in the development and consequently of power of the state institutions *vis-à-vis* political institutions. This imbalance manifests in the domination of powerful military and civil bureaucracy in the politics of Pakistan and the weakness of the political institutions which is rooted in the historical development of these institutions.

British rule—concerned with the development of an efficient and effective system of defence and internal security and administrative system which could control the Indians and provide stability to their rule—led them to place high priority on the development of two institutions, the military and civil bureaucracy. Reared in a colonial context, the two powerful institutions lacked a commitment to democracy for historical and structural reasons. They were developed to protect colonial interests and not to serve the larger society.<sup>7</sup>

To justify their indirect control and direct intervention in political process the bureaucracy and military developed an ideology and a set of perceptions. Politics was

projected as disorderly, inefficient and corrupt method of running the affair of a society compared to the rational, efficient, quick and clean way the bureaucracy and military ran themselves. Besides, as irrational politics and corrupt politicians subverted the military's capacity for national defence and that of the bureaucracy to run the country smoothly, it was argued that they should not be permitted to meddle in the internal affairs of both the institutions. If their irrationality and stupidity threatened the independence of the nation, the military was morally bound to overthrow them. This view of politics gained greater acceptance after the military top brass became political rulers and as and when the character of Pakistani politics occasionally provided some substance to it.<sup>8</sup>

The weakness and underdevelopment of other political institutions, enabled the military and the bureaucracy to further strengthen and actualize their latent tendency inherited from their colonial nurturing to become political rulers. These institutions have yet to accept fully their subordinate role to political institutions—a role crucial for the functioning of democracy. The military has overtly intervened in national political process three times overthrowing civilian governments and has covertly influenced, and sometime made, major political decisions often. The army was directly responsible for the removal of two prime ministers—Junejo in 1985 and Benazir Bhutto in 1990—when they refused to stay within the confines of power and decision-making circumscribed for them by the military. The military also influenced election outcomes in 1988 and 1990. The military was indirectly responsible for the removal of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in 1993 by brokering the resignation of the warring president and prime minister to break the deadlock between them, which had brought the country's political and administrative machinery to a standstill. The deadlock was created when the president dissolved the National Assembly using his power under Article 58(2)(B)—an aberration of the parliamentary system—put into the constitution by Zia-ul Haq, Pakistan's previous martial law dictator. The Supreme Court restored the Assembly, which aggravated the conflict between the President and the Prime Minister. Recently though the direct and overt role of the military in politics is declining, it still enjoys a high degree of autonomy from political institutions and controls policy decisions on some critical issues such as relations with India, US and nuclear development.

The civil bureaucracy, the most powerful organisation after the military, has also exercised considerable political power in conjunction with the military though more often as its junior partner. Recently its power is somewhat declining and it is unlikely that in the future any political office would be occupied by a bureaucrat.

Military rulers have affected the growth of political institutions but more fateful has been its impact on the independence of judiciary. Military regimes sought their legitimacy from the judiciary and having made the decision to stage a coup they took all covert measures to ensure that the judiciary declared their coup legitimate.

The Pakistani judiciary has had to exert to assert its independence and to ensure the rule of law, protect the fundamental rights of the individual and his right to form and join political parties and participate in the political process through them in very difficult circumstances. The judiciary has also provided relief to citizens in a large number of cases since it was granted the power of Writ in 1954. The judiciary also lifted the ban against the Jamaat-e-Islami during the Ayub period and struck down the clause requiring the registration of political parties during the Zia rule. However, during these trying times it has not come out always unblemished.

The last decade of democracy has seen the judiciary grow more assertive and take

decisions it would never had taken under martial law. However it will have to be seen if the judiciary will grow into a bulwark for democracy in Pakistan. There has been inconsistency in its decisions regarding the restoration of assemblies when they were dismissed on four occasions. The relations of the judiciary and the prime minister took a turn for the worse under the last government of Benazir Bhutto. The danger that the judiciary was becoming politicised was averted by the Supreme Court judgment of 20 March, 1996 concerning the appointment of judges. This judgement reduced the power of the executive to appoint political and partisan judges. This has increased the independence of judiciary. Together with this, if the judiciary places its judicial activism at the service of the people it may be a positive sign for the growth of democracy in Pakistan.<sup>9</sup>

### **State *vis-à-vis* civil society: democratisation of Pakistani society**

The political community of Pakistan on which a democratic edifice could be built stands on fragile social and cultural foundations. The micro and macro ethnic divisions present and somewhat latent in pre-Pakistan social system have become a focus of political mobilisation and basis for the allocation of resources and provision of state services. The intensity of these divisions accompanied by escalating intolerance for different ethnic groups is rising. The denial of legitimacy of ethnic identity and ethnic demands by the rulers since the inception of the country instead of weakening have strengthened them. Ethnic organisations, ethnic assertion in cultural form and ethnic political demands are frowned upon by the state. The Pakistani state itself though is not ethnic neutral or even ethnic representative but ethnic hegemonic.<sup>10</sup> Ethnic assertion and ethnic political claims are viewed by the state as an indication of lack of patriotism and disloyalty to the country. Consequently, the demands for justice by the deprived and disadvantaged ethnic groups have frequently faced state repression. A part of the Pakhtoon and Baloch in first decade, Baloch and Bengalis in the Third and fourth decade and Sindhis and Mohajirs in the present decade have been a target of state repression.

The capacity of fractured political community or civil society of Pakistan to mould the powerful state institutions inherited from the British continue to remain weak. The power of the Pakistani state over the society and the people is considerable. The intermediary institutions between the state and the society such as voluntary organisations, civic groups, and autonomous professional groups have either not grown due to the hostility of the state towards them or have remained weak and dependent on the state and therefore become an appendage of state institutions. In these conditions, little empowerment of the people through their own organisations has occurred though the situation is changing during the last several years.

Economic democracy, as well remains distant, with capital and land held by the few. Globalisation trends do not augur well for economic democracy as well as growth policies that favor capital growth for the wealthy and powerful are being pursued. Indebtedness further makes political democracy but a mockery since basic needs for the majority of the population are increasingly not being met.

However, increasing urbanisation, greater access to mass media, national and international, participation in three anti-authoritarian movements—Anti-Ayub, Pakistan National Alliance (PNA), and in the 1980's, the Movement to Restore Democracy (MRD), the elections of 1970 and recent elections, have contributed to the rise of political awakening in the country particularly in the urban areas. The elections, access to media and

the three anti-authoritarian movements helped by the Green Revolution in the seventies, migration to Middle-Eastern and other countries in late seventies and 1980s resulting in certain degree of improvement in material conditions of the rural lower middle class, have also raised political consciousness in rural areas. This change in political consciousness has somewhat weakened the traditional relations between the state and the people. However, the lower economic classes particularly in the rural areas still remain caught in the patron–client relations to achieve security and livelihood and relate to the state through the intermediacy of local power structure.

Deepening poverty in Pakistan does not bode well for democratic institutions. One of the factors for the low turnout in the 1997 elections was the severe economic brunt the common man and woman has to carry for the IMF conditionalities imposed on the country. It appears that the common person has figured out that he will have no relief from the IMF conditionalities whether it is Sharif or Benazir in power. If the economic hardship of the people continues then there is a possibility that the masses could take violently to the streets. People may not just demand change of government and parties which have been tried. They may demand the change of the democratic system as well. To maintain faith in the democratic system thus constitutes a major challenge for the new government. Without a commitment to economic democracy, that is to say, ever deepening levels of democracy, the future for Pakistan's political democracy will remain bleak.

The process of democratisation of Pakistani society has achieved a certain degree of advancement since the inception of the country. To some extent helped by the stay of Pakistanis for prolonged period outside the country as migrants and exposure to foreign cultures particular to the West, the inegalitarian aspects of the old order are increasingly being questioned and rejected. A concept of social equality is emerging. Furthermore as the hold of feudalism in the countryside weakens, non-democratic and inegalitarian norms on which the rural society was organised are collapsing. The vertical caste-like social organisation of rural society is losing its traditional hold. The inegalitarian relations between different ethnic groups are also being challenged as members of these groups come into direct mutual contact due to rural to urban and inter-provincial migration.

In urban areas where social inequality was not as steep as in rural areas, the weaker classes show greater political assertion challenging the traditional order and the state apparatus. Besides, now professional groups such as lawyers, teachers, journalists, doctors, engineers have emerged. Among these professions, those working outside the state sector assert a degree of autonomy from the state and demand greater freedom and democracy. Various groups in the society organised in the form of NGOs challenge the domination of the state apparatus over the society. The state apparatus responds to this by using its power and manipulating the law to maintain and restore its power leading to unusual atrocities and oppression. These changes have produced a high level of conflict and breakdown of social order. It is, however, not certain whether the questioning and rejection of the old order will lead to the emergence of egalitarian and democratic relations within different social classes and the society and between the state and society.

### **Religion and its impact on democracy**

As important as the role of the military and bureaucracy and economic democracy is the role of religion in creating a democratic future for Pakistan.

As happened during Muslim rule in India, the Muslim masses remained politically illiterate and passive during the British rule as well. However, after the British introduced political reforms the Muslim upper classes became politically active as they saw upper classes Hindus gaining differential access to the colonial state. With this a debate started among the Indian Muslim intellectuals and political elite, both modern and the traditional, whether the concepts of liberal democracy which the colonial rulers intended to introduce were consistent with their cultural and religious prescriptions. Two issues became the focus of debate and controversy: the extent to which religion and politics were inter-linked and whether there was a Islamic political system different from democracy.

The Western educated Muslim liberals from the upper and middle classes considered religion a private affair of the individual and in their political struggle during the colonial period, they regarded it as one of the markers or denominators differentiating Muslims from other groups. In their political struggle, some of them accepted liberal democracy as an ideal political system and other like Allama Iqbal remained ambivalent towards it. However, influenced by the ideas of Sir Ahmad Khan in late 19th century and later under leadership of Muhammad Ali Jinnah they apprehended that democracy in multi-ethnic and multi-religious society of India would establish the permanent political hegemony of upper class Hindus due to the numerical strength of the Hindu majority. Initially they sought assurances and guarantees from the British and All India Congress for safeguarding Muslim interests and demanded that democratic principles should be applied to India recognising that it contained two nations, Muslims and Hindus. This was a modified application of democracy but not its rejection. When they failed to achieve this they demanded a separate country.<sup>11</sup> During the struggle for Pakistan, particularly at its later stage, liberal Muslims leading the struggle could not maintain their initial posture of delinking religion and politics; instead, they gave it an interpretation which would help transform Pakistan into a modern democratic country.

After the emergence of Pakistan, the liberal interpretation of Islam as a force which could help to end the inequitable feudal system, inculcate tolerance for different religion and sects and provide cultural underpinnings for a modern liberal democratic state were eclipsed particularly after the 1977 coup. Some of the exponents of liberal Islam were persecuted and a distinguished scholar Dr. Fazal Rahman was hounded out of the country in the mid 1960s.

After the 1977 coup, liberal Islam and democracy suffered at the hands of General Zia-ul Haq under political compulsion. In order to eradicate the somewhat secularist PPP and its leader Bhutto, the General sought alliances with the ulema and religious oriented parties. These alliances tried to impose on Pakistani society what they considered an Islamic polity with the force of martial law. A debate was also started whether democracy itself was consistent with Islam.

After the lifting of martial law in 1986, the half-hearted and opportunistic efforts to establish a liberal version of Islam, a vision of democracy that includes deep democracy and basic human rights (including the rights of community and freedom from hunger) has also not taken off. The Islamic epistemology movement focused on rethinking Western science and developing an Islamic science that is softer on nature, more participatory and less linked to the military-industrial complex and more focused on local problems has been coopted by the ulema leading to a focus on such problems as the distance of heaven from earth and the potential role of angels as fuel in Earth-Mars flights.<sup>12</sup> The reality of historical politics has meant the appropriation of Islamic ideals for political

parties more concerned with 'othering' each other and foreign nations. The interpretation of Islamic codes of behavior have remained with the ulema with individuals unable to challenge these interpretations.

Historically, the orthodox ulema perceived Islam as a total system governing all aspects of the life of Muslims including politics. They advocated that there existed a distinct Islamic political system different from other political systems. However, unlike most of the liberal Muslim intellectuals and political leaders, the ulema did not find this interpretation of Islam to be constraining them to seek a separate country. Most of them wanted to keep India united through a social contract on the pattern of the early state of Medina in which the Muslims and the non-Muslims coexisted as equal citizens. Some wanted to establish a cultural confederation in India similar to one in Switzerland and other countries which protected the rights of different religious and cultural groups.<sup>13</sup>

On the conceptual level most of the ulema characterised liberal democracy as an offspring of Western atheistic civilisation and an anathema to their religious beliefs as it gave sovereignty to the people which they believed belonged only to God. They insisted that the absolute right to frame the constitution and laws which the liberal democracy conferred on individual and representative institutions infringed on the sovereignty of God. Humans at best could make laws within the limits set by the divine laws and these limits could be identified only by the expert in Islam, that is, the ulema themselves.<sup>14</sup>

Once Pakistan was created, the ulema including those who opposed its creation viewed it as their religious obligation and duty to 'Islamise' it. They vehemently argued that the country was created to establish an Islamic society and polity and that Islamic democracy was superior to the liberal democracy and they are mutually incompatible. They also perceived a conspiracy being hatched by 'westernised' class in which they included some prominent Muslim League leaders to divert Pakistan away from its true destiny. They exerted enough pressure on government in the early 50s which led to the adoption of 'Objective Resolution' which handed them the first victory. This outlook and attitude of ulema gave rise to several controversies including who among the different Muslim sects was within or outside the pale of Islam and whether Muslim and non-Muslim could have a joint electorate. As these issues took the central stage the commitment to democracy in Pakistan weakened.<sup>15</sup>

The anti-Bhutto PNA movement initially launched to protest against the rigging of elections in 1977 and was democratic in orientation was converted into demand for Nizam-e-Mustafa (the system of the prophet) by the well-organised Jamaat-e-Islami. It generated tremendous religious fervour particularly in urban areas. General Zia, after overthrowing Bhutto in 1977, entered an alliance with the religious parties, which pushed him to 'Islamise' the polity and society. The period of martial law from 1977 to 1986 was era of ulema's relative domination of politics from virtual eclipse since Ayub's martial law in 1958.

During the 1980s several changes occurred including a global religious revival, the success of the Afghan Jihad, the disintegration of the Soviet Union interpreted by the ulema as the demise of an anti-Islam atheist state and ideology leading to the freeing of the Central Asian Republics from their bondage to socialist dogma. These events enhanced the confidence and the ability of the ulema to significantly influence politics in Pakistan. Although they have in all elections secured insignificant votes they have been confident that with some degree of political mobilisation they can transform Pakistan into what they regard as a truly Islamic state and ensure the demise of secularism (defined

as anti-religion) and liberal democracy. With the internationalisation of communication technology and the vulnerability of local culture to Western and somewhat global culture, the enlargement and expansion of secular professional groups in Pakistan and the presence of PPP attracting a stable and solid voting block, this confidence was misplaced and not rooted in the realities of Pakistani politics. First, the religious parties since lifting of martial law in 1985 have not been able to capture significant number of seats in legislatures even when they were part of state sponsored Islamic Democratic Alliance in 1988 and 1990. The elections indicating that their following is limited. They were almost wiped out in the 1993 elections and the well-organised Jamaat and some other parties apprehending a dismal performance boycotted the 1997 elections, though the reason they gave was that the election would return the same corrupt people. The above reasoning does not necessarily suggest that religion and religious parties as advocates of Islamic state have exhausted their potential for influencing Pakistani politics and weakening liberal democracy. With a weak liberal democratic tradition in Pakistan, the reluctance of any major political party including PPP to espouse liberalism openly and confront the ulema, considerable erosion of vote bank of apparently secular PPP in 1993, the overwhelming domination of political institutions by a dominant feudal class seeking a safeguard of their economic interests and their traditional outlook from orthodox Islam of ulama, the religious parties still have the potential of mobilising people on a large scale over issues of corruption or economic deterioration. They could still bring an end to the liberal democratic system with the promise of creating an Islamic government.

The linkage between religion and state and nation in Pakistan has thus given birth to certain problems which the country has yet to resolve. First is the status of minorities whose political status since the emergence of Pakistan has remained precarious. The minorities who became part of the new country were not able to develop automatically a sense of belonging to the new nation. The struggle for Pakistan was cast as Hindu versus Muslims and the Muslim League, the party which led the Pakistan movement mostly mobilised Muslims for creating the country. Besides, the movement liberally used religious symbols and slogans. At the time, a large number of Hindus left the country which homogenised the country. The non-Muslims who did not migrate to India were naturally seized with the anxiety whether they were a member of the new nation or not and if they were what would be their status in the new country. Besides as their overall numerical strength and material affluence was weak they were unable to demand equality of political status in the new country. As the Islamic character of the new nation came to be stressed after partition and occasionally the loyalty of the non-Muslims particularly the Hindu's became suspect the alienation of minorities increased and the issue of place of non-Muslim being equal members of the Pakistani nation became of political importance. This made the challenge of nation building more difficult and complex. Attempts to create Pakistaniness through hate-India campaigns further fueled intolerance for minorities. The combined impact of all these factors made granting of equality of political and cultural status to religious minorities difficult and placed them at a serious disadvantage despite certain constitutional guarantees and provisions to protect their rights.

Since the 1977 coup, the political climate in the country has increasingly worsened for the non-Muslim minorities. The continued adverse relations between India and Pakistan and communalization of politics in India have also contributed to the worsening of the fate of minorities particularly the Hindus in Sindh, who live in a province bordering on India, where certain elements with secessionist designs exist. They are more vulnerable

to charges of Indian agents. The existence of a political climate suffused with religious sentiments, the introduction of laws discriminatory against non-Muslims and the law enforcement agencies coming from the dominant Muslim sects with a degree of bias against non-Muslim minorities are not conducive for the protection of the right of religious minorities particularly the Ahmadis, the Hindus and to a lesser extent other minorities.

Instead of making serious efforts to incorporate the religious minorities into the main stream of national politics, Pakistani rulers by their myopic policies aggravated religious and ethnic divisions thus weakening the fragile foundation of political community.

The linkage between religion and state has its impact on inter-Muslim relations too. During the early fifties a movement was started to declare Ahmadis as non-Muslim.<sup>16</sup> The movement finally succeeded in the early 1970 when the 1973 constitution was amended to declare this sect a religious minority. During the 1980s the Objective Resolution which laid the foundation of an Islamic state from a pre-amble of the constitution became an integral part of it. It was amended and the word 'freely' was deleted from the sentence stating that 'adequate provision shall be made for the minorities to profess and practice their religions and develop their cultures'. Several laws were enacted restricting the religious freedom of minorities particularly those of Ahmadis. The religionisation of state and society promoted by General Zia and inter-sectarian rivalries of other Muslim countries particularly Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia has fuelled inter-Muslim sectarianism leading to terrorist activities against each other. Certain fringe groups among orthodox Muslims demand that at least two sects, Zikris and Shias, now considered Muslim by most Muslims, should be declared non-Muslim minorities. Some of them also demand that Pakistan be declared a Sunni state, arguing that the Sunnis being in majority in the country have the right to such a state. The frequency of intra-Muslim sectarian riots and the murder of prominent religious figures is continuously increasing.<sup>17</sup>

The linking of religion and politics in Pakistan has also affected the status of women in the society and opportunities for self-realisation. It has reinforced the traditional patriarchal social structure and culture of Pakistan which assigned lower status to females. Woman's proper place being in the home and proper role as family makers, she is directly and structurally excluded from decision making. With the exception of a few noteworthy leaders, their representation in the public economic and political sphere is considered improper. The representation of women in national legislature has remained one of the lowest.<sup>18</sup> The religious orthodoxy questioned the right of a female to rule Pakistan when Benazir Bhutto became head of PPP and later prime minister twice. Women are the victims of direct and structural violence as well. Compared to the improvement of the status of the male in the society and his participation in the affairs of political community, the female in Pakistan remains considerably handicapped and a disadvantaged group. Several laws discriminating against women were passed during the last military regime and were often justified in the name of religion. Pakistan signed the UN convention concerning the removal of discrimination against women after considerable hesitation only in 1995. The formation of organisations representing and defending women interests are frowned upon by religious orthodoxy. A few organisations that have emerged remain weak due to their internal divisions on sectarian, ethnic and political lines.<sup>19</sup>

Within this process, efforts to develop Islamic forms of governance that do not ape Western institutions are frequently appropriated by those who care little for innovation and more for finding ways to 'Other' those, to claim purity for themselves and evil or immorality for others. True Islamic governance in terms of deep consultation (shura)

amongst all levels of the ummah (Muslim community) remains elusive. Moreover, the fractured Islamic world with all sorts of tribal divisions make an Islamic model of polity, one that transcends Western notions of the nation-state, equally problematic.

While the concept and ideal of ummah as a politically organised universal fraternity of Muslims is part of the intellectual heritage of the Muslims all over the world, however, the adherence and realisation of this in practice and building a Muslim community at a world level has historically been very difficult as the history of Muslims testify. Building such a community even in a particular geographical region like India proved a highly challenging job even for the rulers who wanted to create a Muslim community to fortify their personal rule.

The response of Pakistani elite to the new challenge was not a realistic and adequate to meet the complex problem of nation building. Instead of accepting the existence of concrete realities and problems and developing policies which could meet them, they remained prisoners of the political mentality, and slogans and strategies which they thought had worked during the Pakistan movement. The ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity came to be viewed as subversive of Muslim and Pakistani consciousness and therefore a threat to emergent Pakistani nation and a disease to be eradicated. This was particularly true with respect to creating a national language. Instead of letting a common national language which all the people could speak evolve through cultural interaction, an attempt was made to impose Urdu disregarding the sentiments of different linguistic groups and the impracticality of teaching Urdu to a vast non-Urdu speaking illiterate population particularly in East Bengal.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, instead of recognising the parity of cultures of various groups and providing them an opportunity to flourish, in the name of Pakistani and Muslim nationalism the development of other cultures was ignored even discouraged. The history of Pakistan came to be written in a way in which there was no place for the history of its component Bengali, Sindhi, Pakhtoon and Baluch cultures. Their literature and their political struggles were made silent.

The political groups and parties such as Khudai-Khidmatgars which did not support the Pakistan movement were not to be won over through compromise and accommodation but to be suppressed if necessary through coercion. Instead of using the progressive concept of religion for building a Pakistani nation and political community on the basis of social justice and equality, the 'danger to Islam' slogan was repeatedly used to silence political opponents. The interests of local population particularly in Sindh were sacrificed to accommodate those of the migrants. Resistance to this was suppressed. Pakistani political leaders for long have not recognised the existence of diversity of ethnic groups in Pakistan with the belief that ethnicity is contrary to religion, though most of them have used ethnicity to consolidate their power.

In short, Pakistan has yet to become a tolerant and pluralistic political community in which the state ceases to dominate the society. A political culture and community which tolerates and accommodates different groups with diverse cultural and ethnic traditions and secures loyalty and allegiance of such groups by accommodating rather than suppressing them has yet to develop.

The emerging capitalist class has not challenged the feudal structure with conditions for workers in factories and for peasants in rural villages abysmal.

## **Democratic status in the global power structure**

The evaluation on the basis of this criteria reflect a mixed advancement. During the first half of its life Pakistani rulers did not make a conscious decision to remain neutral in the cold war between the two superpowers. Instead, Pakistan accepted an unequal status in the Western power block. Only in the mid-sixties a certain effort was made to assert its independence from the West but it was not motivated to achieve self-determination and equal status in the world community but out of political necessity as the patron of Pakistani ruler—the USA—started arming India and later stopped military and economic aid to it as a consequence of the Indo–Pak war of 1965. This movement away from dependence on the West and diversification of links with countries which USA frowned upon and entry into Non Alignment Movement gave a new image to Pakistan which was lost when Pakistan accepted aid to resist Soviet intervention in Afghanistan.

Pakistan's unresolved international problems and its external linkages have not helped to deepen democracy in Pakistan. In fact they constitute an obstacle. In the fifties military links with the US helped Pakistan to modernise its armed forces which assuaged its anxieties about its insecurity it felt in relation to its larger neighbour India. But this also tilted the balance of power in state institutions including the military which has affected political development of Pakistan bringing in three military coups. Indirect participation of Pakistan's military in the freedom struggle of Afghanistan led to a heroin–gun culture in the north of Pakistan. The persistent unrest in Afghanistan continues to tax Pakistan's economy. The unresolved Kashmir problem and strained relations with India keeps its defence expenditure high turning the internal balance of power in favour of the military and against the political institutions. It creates an intellectual climate in which critique of power is seen as unpatriotic. Deconstruction of basic knowledge structures, particularly the current appropriation of Islam by conservative forces, is considered immoral. Crises outside the country are thus used by internal forces as a way to hold the status-quo, alleging all sorts of machinations by foreign design. More than perhaps any place on the planet Pakistan is the home of conspiracy theorists. Transparent political, religious and social institutions remains an almost unrealisable goal.

## **Conclusion: Pakistan at the crossroads**

To summarize: The first important process creating the future is the role of the Army. The process of the civilianisation of Pakistan's martial law regime began in 1985. Since then the army has been operating from behind the scenes, influencing policy making especially in the fields of defence and foreign policy. While the army has not withdrawn from the political arena, it does appear now that it has withdrawn from intervening in elections.

The second important factor in creating the future of democracy is the absence of a culture of tolerance. Unfortunately, nation-building, as explained earlier, has proceeded along lines of making distinctions between others instead of seeking national similarities. The vortex of 'othering' continues unabated in Pakistan.

The third important factor is the pervasiveness of corruption at structural levels. Pakistan has witnessed continuous decline in low turnouts in successive elections; 45% in 1988, 43% in 1990, 40% in 1993, and now about 36%. Politics is monopolised by a small feudal class which can finance its entry into politics. The four elections in the past

decade have returned to power more or less the same faces. Most people have lost faith in these people who have indulged in widespread corruption. One reason for the low turnout in the recent elections indicates the people's negative vote against corrupt politicians.

The fourth major factor is the structure of Pakistan's political-economy, now comprised of deep debts, with the government nearing total collapse.

The fifth major factor creating the future of democracy is the politics and strategies of Pakistan's religious parties, which at this time are far more important than deeper issues of indigenous knowledge or the creation of an ideal Islamic culture and nation.

The sixth factor influencing the future of democracy are structural changes in the nature of democracy in Pakistan. The Council for Defense and National Security and the ability of the President to dissolve the national assembly has weakened the power of elected leaders. However, with the adoption of the thirteenth amendment, structural relations have changed again in favor of the prime minister.

The seventh critical factor is the role of the judiciary in balancing the arbitrary power of the State (the military and the party in power). Currently, the Judiciary remains independent having survived the attacks on it during the Zia years and recently during the second Benazir Bhutto government. At present it is using this independence in the service of democracy. But it cannot be predicted that it will maintain this posture in the future as well.

The 1997 elections were monitored by foreign and local election officials which reported by and large no irregularities. Along with the elections in 1993, this means that Pakistan has experienced two elections which were fair in contrast to the elections in 1990 which were blatantly rigged. This augers well for future elections in Pakistan and the consolidation of democracy as it indicates that one aspect of democracy i.e. the holding of free and fair elections is taking roots.

The international climate is in favour of democratic governments and not dictatorships. The opening up of the political system has led to growing political consciousness among the masses in Pakistan which is a positive development for democracy. Even the stranglehold of feudals which has characterised Pakistan when the military was not in power is now somewhat weakening with an industrialist Prime Minister enjoying tremendous power.

Against these limited achievements should be placed the lack of significant advancement in reconstituting gender, inter-ethnic and class relations on the basis of social and economic equality and justice.

With the military having a strong presence in politics of Pakistan, it is uncertain who will win the final political battle in Pakistan—an Islamic state of ulema's vintage, liberal democracy or military bureaucratic authoritarianism.

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