

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

A Comparative Study of the Recent Political Trends of Pakistan and Bangladesh that Fluctuate between Democracy and Autocracy

HPI Nadeeshani

Senior Lecturer, Department of Political Science,
University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka

Abstract:

South Asian politics, which involves India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Maldives and Bhutan, is a significant area in the field of international politics. These countries that were under the British rule for a considerable period of time consists of certain colonial political traditions they inherited, and with the decolonization these countries have faced several issues in terms of economy, politics and society. As far as these political issues are concerned, establishment of democracy is observed to be under a very weak and slow process; the political power is often seen fluctuating between democracy and Autocracy. The conflicts between democracy and Autocracy are not unprecedented in the world history, and at one instance, the democracy wins and at the other, the Autocracy wins. Weak democracy getting swiftly transformed into Autocracy, and later Autocracy gradually being replaced by democracy, which once again becomes weak and getting transformed into Autocracy happens as a circle. Therefore, the present study examined as to, in terms of Pakistan and Bangladesh, the causes behind the exchange of power between democracy and military for a long time in history and the reasons as to why this trend has changed after 2008 which made democratic governments last longer than before. In addition, nationalism, secularism and the social and legal background of these countries in the light of establishing democracy are also to be examined in the research. The research was conducted using secondary resources and it was revealed that in both these states, Islamic social system and the religious values have been significant influences in transforming democracy into Autocracy. Due to the strong bond with the religion, these states are incapable of achieving a fully furnished democracy, for the religious authority has diffused into the social system and then into the politics. Moreover, as a result of the less evolved political culture, the civil society has become unstable, and they tend to believe that military is the solution to stabilize the unstable social system. Hence, when a military system takes over, no revolution in the social system can be identified. However, after 2008, this situation has unexpectedly changed as a result of the influence of international politics, human rights, attraction of the civil leaders and the rise of social media. Nevertheless, the problem that although these states have not changed into a military system, Autocracy being still found within the democracy.

Keywords: A Comparative, political trends, Pakistan, Bangladesh, democracy, autocracy

1. Introduction

When it comes to Pakistan and Bangladesh, they became a separate state from India, immediately after India gained independence in 1947 from the British rule, as a result of a strong movement of a majority of Muslims. West Pakistan and East Pakistan became a state independent from India. Pakistan was based on Islam and ruled as per the constitution of India. The founder of Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah addressed the Constituent Assembly and stated that they are a Constituent Assembly which holds the sovereignty of the people. Hence, it is certain that a sovereign government was what the Pakistan required at the beginning. Nevertheless, democracy was not established in Pakistan as expected. At present, Bangladesh has faced a similar situation. Being ruled under India and Pakistan for a particular period of time, in 1971 they separated from being the East Pakistan and broke away from the West Pakistan, establishing their own state based in their Bengali identity. After the independence, both these states accepted the parliamentary system, which has been declared by the British to be compatible by nature with the instincts and intellectual abilities of the British community and which is considered a successful tool in implementing theoretical democratic concepts in real life. Although British rule in these countries created numerous problems, still there were some good that came out of it. Institutional development and the comprehension on it were some of the significant contributions of the rule; the administrative system, legal and judicial systems were areas well versed by the British. Indians were joined by the British for their colonial process and democratic institution a long before India gained independence. They were introduced provincial and divisional politics, which was strengthened by the experiences on democratic competition and governance gained when the Congress Party won the elections before independence. Congress Party, as a national political force, hastened the process of Autocratic transformation speedy (Frank, J.C. 1995, P.35). As a result, Indian national movement can be considered the largest public activist movement based on a democratic foundation; nonviolence and democracy

were the main components of this movement. Indian National Congress was not a party but a social movement in which all nationalities, including Hindu, Muslim, Bengali and communities belonging to different religions casts and creeds as well as groups holding different political views, such as Marxists, socialists and liberalists, were united. The Congress represented an anti-colonialist, secularist and nationalist ideology. The internal structure of the Congress was set so that internal democracy functions at its best. Gandhi and the leaders of India built a united nation that is necessary to maintain the unity of the nation through their struggle to free India from British rule so strongly that there was no person who was not influenced by this movement. This was a result of the logical outcome of the Indian democracy.

The pioneers of the Indian freedom struggle included Muslim and Bengali nationals, who were rich with experience on the nationalist movement. However, immediately after the independence from the British, these two states are seen not seen observing the same rules of democracy, for the democratic crisis both these countries have faced so far have been massive and frequent. One of the main problems these two countries faced was the inability to maintain stable democracies; the democracy was limited to a short period of time, which was followed by a transformation into military governance. As a result, both these countries face the problems of transiting democracy, uniting new and stable democracies and re-balancing the half-collapsed democracy (Frank 1995-75-98).

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Democracy

The term “democracy” is a combination of two Greek terms “demos”, which means “people”, and “kratos” which means “power”; “democracy” means the “power of people”. It is highly doubtful as to whether there is any word in the political dictionary as sensitive and provocative as the word “democracy”. In terms of interpreting and describing what democracy is, no universally accepted set of rules or theories can be found. Moreover, no school or person is the sole founder of this concept. Regardless of certain discrepancies, the theories on democracy can be divided into two categories.

One category holds on to the idea that democracy is the governance involving the public as a whole or a majority of them. Cleon first presenting this idea in 422 B.C stated that what shall be democratic “shall be of the people, by the people, for the people and by the people”. Abraham Lincoln, the President of the United states in the period of 1861-1865, holds the reputation for stating this in the modern age at the famous Gettysburg speech in 1863: “the government of the people, by the people, for the people” What Lincoln meant here was the fact that democratic governance is where every citizen is capable of exercising the sovereign power. Another fine example of democracy is Lord Bryce’s view of democracy which he presents in his work *Modern Democracies*. According to him “democracy is interpreted based on the traditional definitions inferred from the term. In my view, democracy is the governance which allows the majority of qualified citizens taking part in it”. Sir John Seeley, in his book *Introduction to Political Science* interprets democracy as a system of governance in a politically organized society of which everyone constitutes a part.

S.M. Lipset, in *Political Man* defines democracy as “a political system with a social mechanism that allows changing the governments that enforce sovereign power from time to time, electing the preferable persons, out of many competitors, to exercise sovereign power and pressurizing them when necessary”. The above-mentioned views describe and define democracy as a model of governance. Provided that democracy as a governance model, several fundamentals of democratic governance can be identified

- Public preference being supreme
- Government consisting of the representatives legally elected by the public
- Free and fair elections that are held regularly
- Adult franchise
- Government being responsible
- Constitutional government with limited authority
- The purpose of the government being improving the welfare of the public by providing the public with services and facilities
- Accepting the fact that sovereign power is a power entrusted by the public as a trust
- Accepting the fact that vindicating the fundamental rights of the citizen is a main responsibility of the government
- Opportunity given to the public to take part in deciding state policy
- Free and independent judicial system
- Competitive political party system and public pressure groups

According to the second school of thoughts, democracy is not merely a theoretical concept that describes a particular system of governance, but a social philosophy. Democracy lays down the ideal characteristics and values of the human society; not only the political relationships but also economic, social and cultural relationships.

Several definitions based on these fundamentals include Charles E. Merriam’s view presented in his work *The New Democracy and the New Despotism*; that democracy is not merely a collection of theories or a set of guideline of a particular organization, but something that describes the path and ideology of common good interpreted by the common public will.

According to Merriam, ‘common good’ is not limited to the political affairs but a set of broader physical as well as metaphysical ideals. In other words, by common good he refers to features such as promoting public life, improving individuality and letting the public reap the benefits of the economic and social development.

Walter Lippmann interprets democracy as not merely an entity described by a model of governance but something that explains a particular social model. Lipmann is of the view that what is more important is this social model rather than the governance model. Harold J. Laski states that the essence of democracy is safeguarding and ensuring the man’s bond with

the core of existence of the human being and removing any obstacles that negatively affect that process. Hence, the most conspicuous observation is that equality is the most essential feature for the democracy to evolve; equality the human deserves in terms of economic, social and political segments of the society. Laski states that as far as the inequality exists, the human cannot experience the true freedom.

The above interpretations, in general, emphasize the fact that democracy is a mere model of model of governance, but a medium of achieving numerous economic, social and political objectives. Hence, the focus should be on what a democratic society is and the foundations it is built on. The main features of a democratic society are mentioned below.

3. Authoritarian Government

An authoritarian government is a system in which people and groups of people are given less opportunity or no opportunity to take part in the decision-making process. Political power and authority are confined mostly within the political institutions or rulers of the government. In an authoritarian system, the ruler is not subjected to constitutional limitations, and the scope of his power, more often, exceeds the constitution. Nevertheless, this power of the ruler is not utilized always. However, in an authoritarian government, the most crucial feature is the power held by the ruler and not separation of power; the entire opposite of the representative democracy, which makes people live under a tyrant king, dictator or a military junta; the entire opposite of the liberal democracy, for no free civil social activities are allowed in these type of societies.

Authoritarian states make an impact on each and every aspect of the human life, and as a result no special opportunities are open for political activities. Hence, the capacity of the society is limited and in contrast the field of the state is bigger. The authoritarian power has to be obeyed by all the citizens without questioning, and the citizens are not entitled to the rights that are contrary to the expectations of the state.

4. Fluctuations between Bureaucracy and Democracy in Pakistan and Bangladesh

Those who studied democracy held the view that the most successful starts with democratic experience after independence were the former British colonies. Wainer is divides the British guidance into two categories; Rule of law and the general experience on governance. The view of most of the philosophers is as far as these states are concerned, they consisted not only of active political institutions at the time of independence, but also the cultural orientation, agreement on and dedication towards the political process and governance, rule of law that makes an impact on the arbitrary authority. However, the smooth functioning observed in most of the western liberal societies and governments is not observed in Asian states. In Bangladesh and Pakistan instead of democratic characteristics, bureaucratic features have dominated, and no revolution in the civil society can be observed in these societies (Karlelar-2005-65-70). India is the only state in the South Asian region to have democracy successfully applied; in all other countries, it is a failure.

With the independence in India in 1947, West and East states rose and Pakistan's journey as a new state in the world starts with a Constituent Assembly appointed in 10 August 1947, for a new constitution. At this juncture, the position of Islam, division of power between federal states and central government, the relationship between the executive and the legislature and the agents appointed for West and East were to be solved. On 11 August 1947, Muhammad Ali Jinnah stated that the first and the very onerous and responsibility of the Constituent Assembly, as a sovereign body, gathered is the task of framing our future constitution of Pakistan, Nevertheless, Pakistan, in the presence of the challenges in developing a political regime, failed to produce a new constitution until 1958 and the Constituent Assembly was dissolved in 1954. Although a new constitution was formed in 1956, it was in operation only for a short period of two years and was abrogated in 1958, which marked the end of the first democratic rule on 27 October 1958.

The first military government in Pakistan was led by General Mohammed Ayub Khan, followed by his successor General Mohammed Yahya Khan, whose resignation lead to a civil government once again under Zulfikar Ali Bhutto from 1970 to 1977. Ali Bhutto's civil government could function till 1977 when General Zia-Ul-Huq re-established a military government from 1977 to 1988, which was ended by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's daughter Benazir Bhutto and established a civil government for a second time. In the period of 1988-1990 Benazir Bhutto, the leader of the Pakistan People's Party and in the period of 1990-1993 and 1997-1999, the leader of the Pakistan Muslim League, Nawaz Sharif came into power and continued a civil government.

In 1999 Pervez Musharaff, the military leader overthrew the civil government, establishing the third military government in Pakistan, which ended in 2008. Then onwards, for a period of 11 years, Pakistan is seen engaged in a journey on the path of democracy.

Breaking away from West Pakistan, Bangladesh was governed by a Provisional Government at the initial stage with Abu Sayeed Chowdhury, the then Chief Justice, as the President. Sheikh Mujibur Rahuman, the leader of national movement came into power from for the period the 1972-1975 and nationalism, secularism, democracy, and socialism were recognized and declared as the policy of the state. The first military involvement in Bangladesh was recorded in 1975, and General Ziaur Rahman came into power through a military coup d'état, who was assassinated in 1982 and Hussain Muhammad Ershad gained the Presidency. In 1961, a civil government was established and from 1996 to 2006, Begum Khaleda Zia led the country. After 2008, to this date, Bangladesh is experiencing a long period of civil government. Hence, the failure of civil government being remedied by a military government and vice versa which is also visible in the Pakistan government as well. However, this trend is observed somewhat controlled in both states after 2008.

5. Conclusion

In both states, Pakistan and Bangladesh, Islam and Islam society has been a considerable influence on politics, and as a result sovereign religious characteristic have been strongly linked with the political structure. In addition, political illiteracy has made the civil society unstable, leading to the common misbelief that the failure of the civil government can be overcome by military power, and thus no social revolution takes place at the transformation stage from civil to military rule.

This situation has changed after 2008 as a result of the new trends in the international politics, rise of the discourse on human rights and the characteristics of the leaders who take over the civil power. As a result of long-lasting civil governance, these states are fast assimilating to democracy.

Although these states did not transform into an authoritarian government through the military rule, the characteristics of these civil governments indicate certain authoritarian features; violation of human rights and suppression of the opposite parties have made the authoritarian features more visible. This results in the circle of weak democracy being replaced by bureaucracy and vice versa. In addition, it can also be concluded that the way the leaders establish democracy in these states decides whether the democracy is stronger or weaker. Hence the future leaders should focus on and be vigilant about the establishment of democracy more than ever.

6. References

- i. Chadda, M. (2000) *Building Democracy in South Asia*, Lynne Rienner
- ii. Chowdhary, H. (2003). *Democratization in south Asia*. England: Ashgate Publishing Limited.
- iii. David, E., Robert, B.& Kristensen. I, *Democratic Transition*. Harvard University.: Center for International Development
- iv. Frank, J.P, (1976). *Political Ideology of South Asia*. Colombo 05: Marga Publishers.
- v. Frank, J.P, (1976) *Model of Democratic States*. Colombo 05: Marga Publishers
- vi. *Governance and the Electoral Process in Pakistan* international Center for Ethnic Studies Printed by Unie Arts (Pvt) Ltd Colombo
- vii. . Jalal, A. (1995). *Democracy and Authoritarianism in South Asia: A comparative and Historical*. Cambridge university press.
- viii. 8 Karlekar (2005) *Bangladesh: The next Afghanistan* London: Sage Publication,
- ix. 9 Mahfuzul, & Chowdhary, H (2003) *Democratization in south Asia* England: Ashgate Publishing Limited
- x. Peter, B (2010) *Is there a new autocracy Promotion?* United Kingdom: FRIDE Publication
- xi. 11 Ranjith. H, Palliyaguruge, R.C, (2009) *Theoretical Review of the Recent Political Events* Nugegoda: Neo Graphics
- xii. Tatu, V (2004) *Problems of Democracy in Ethnical Divided South Asia* Sweden