

Democracy or Aristocracy?



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Democracy as a model of governance is so intricate that every age and territory has defined and discovered new connotations to its application, and thus the evolution in its theory and practice has extended from one century to the next.

It has been a western idea and historically, the various western political thinkers such as Plato, Aristotle, Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Hegel and Marx have oozed out that democracy as a loadstar is not an ideal system to govern a state. Rousseau, in the 18th century, emerged as the champion of democracy in his Social Contract, but his ideas in practice led to fascism, absolutism and even to communism. He was not in favour of modern-day democracy, which he called “elective aristocracy”. Hegel, in his History of Philosophy, favoured monarchy over democracy while Karl Marx in Das Capital preferred communism over democracy.

Within this context, western political thought ever since Plato has vacillated between monarchy, aristocracy, communism and democracy to govern a given state.

Pakistan is still standing at the threshold of democracy — a borrowed concept from the West — which is born and then bloomed intermittently between the years of military might. Democracy which rests on the anchor of a popular premise i.e., “Government is of the people, by the people and for the people”, but in Pakistan, it is applied the other way round and i.e., “Government is of the elites, by the elites and for the elites”. Unfortunately, here autocratic forces have always been succeeding in protecting and preserving their own power positions by moulding the democratic norms to their own advantage.

Since Pakistan’s inception, except for a few ones, no dictator or a political leader could ever try to ameliorate the immortal miseries of the masses, the majority of the latter, is still miles away from the basic concept and functioning of democracy.

Thus the current pattern of democracy in Pakistan — which is clothed, exercised and steered by the inherent owners i.e., the elite club — puts forth a plethora of plain questions: which are begging for answers. But can never be responded, until the system movers give up their luxurious living standards which they have been affording by misusing and abusing their power posts. Regrettably, all this deception is carried on under the garb of democracy.

Under the aegis of this “hugged” system, when corrupts live in the heydays forever, and each passing day further drench the sweat of the poor into poverty, when respect and respectable are recognised by their wealth, when injustice wins over justice, likewise, when elites and the powerful — tailor and twist the rule of law to their ends, and finally when fair and unfair means mingle into one another, how then one can ever imagine that Pakistan will ever prosper with this fractured, flawed and loopholed system?

In a “Pakistani” democracy, the power pushers like political elites, business tycoons and the influential are generally symbolised with malpractices. For them, bamboozling law is considered a mundane practice, thereby, disabling the judiciary to nab them, while on the other hand, justice for the lower, decrepit and downtrodden common populace is still a far cry. Resultantly, this unmerited system has not only created confusion and chaos but also further divided the society into many ideological fault lines. In a verse Allama Iqbal has truly epitomised the concept of an ideologically skeptical nation: “Listen, you captive of modern civilisation, To lack faith is worse than slavery.”

It is a heart wrenching and a stygian reality that the whole nation is more or less ruled by the aristocrats; be it feudal lords, Industrialists, ethnic, religious and Institutionalised groups, and political elites etc. who have had been mastering, making and breaking our destiny. If any finger is raised on their accountability, all the ruling elites start haunting and hounding in response to save their very own aristocracy.

This also reminds me of one of the commandments, proclaimed by pigs that controlled the government in an allegorical novel, *Animal Farm* written by George Orwell, on the Russian revolution, which stated “All animals are equal”. After the revolution, pigs amend the commandment into “All animals are equal but some are more equal than others”. This quote sarcastically reflects the hypocrisy of governments that declare the absolute equality of their citizens but give power and privileges to a small elite.

Thus far, democracy in its true spirit is prevalent in a few states. Some contemporary writers have been arguing that the form of governance, even in a mature democracy like the US is oligarchic rather than democratic.

Pakistan, as per its constitution, is an Islamic republic. In the light of Sharia principles, certain fundamentals of Islam cannot be altered, following the generally accepted norms of western democracy, where a vote of the majority is a defining factor. Although, around the world, a lot of comparative analysis has been drawn between Islamic and western democracy, yet an Islamic state can't adopt the concept of western democracy, with all its ingredients. Allama Iqbal in this verse exquisitely enunciated the difference between western and Islamic democracy: "Democracy is a certain form of government in which, Men are counted but not weighed".

In other words, Allama Iqbal has introduced a new concept of democracy, where quality carries a preferential right over quantity to form a welfare state. For true democracy, the Sharia Council of Pakistan, being a constitutional body, must be assigned for articulating a new social order including an electoral system through which honest, deserving and qualified people could be elected to run the government affairs, following the footsteps of our religion.

On a concluding note, the Pakistani nation from its length to its breadth will never be able to wriggle out from its miseries, if the prevailing worn-out aristocratic system is not replaced by a truly honest and just democratic structure. Lingering on with the same shabby system at some point will naturally lead to a grotesque form of anarchism or the worst.