

Name of the Ph.D Scholar: Shiraz Sheikh

Name of the Supervisor: Prof. Ajay Darshan Behera

**Title of the Thesis: Democracy and Authoritarianism: The Role of Political Parties in
Pakistan**

ABSTRACT

Introduction and Background

Pakistan was created as a homeland for the Muslims of colonial India and promised as an ideal state that was to set an example of egalitarian social and political order for the modern world. But soon after its creation, Pakistan found itself mired in political crises and as a result Pakistan's political process became hostage to military interventions. There are several studies that have explained the rise of authoritarian military regimes and the decline of the democratic system in Pakistan. Some of the reasons were the inheritance of weak political institutions, nature of political culture in tribal and feudal societies, Islamic group's rejection of the democratic system as they claimed power due to Pakistan's ideological origin and military's cyclic seizure of political power. The cumulative impact of these factors certainly played a role in the marginalisation of the democratic process but this study argues that political parties had a definitive correlation to the growth and diminution of the democratic institutions in Pakistan.

This hypothesis was derived from the fact that in the last seven decades, the political parties in Pakistan got repeated opportunities to rule the country and strengthen democratic institutions. The study argues that the political parties were the central force which was needed for the legitimisation and stabilisation of the political process and system. And for this reason, even the military regimes created their own political parties or patronised some parties. In this framework, this study explores this intriguing paradox about why political parties which found their opportunities to consolidate democratic institutions could not seize those moments. To understand why the political parties behaved the way they did, this study analyses the following research questions: To what extent the political parties were responsible for the deepening of authoritarianism and consolidation of democracy in Pakistan? Why political parties showed authoritarian tendencies? What was the role of authoritarian tactics and policies of political parties in depoliticising the masses which had implications for democratisation in Pakistan?

The Study

To answer these questions the study has been divided into three parts. The first part examines the conceptual correlation between the political parties, democracy and authoritarianism. The second part of the thesis is largely based on historical and descriptive narrative of the social and political origin of political parties in Pakistan. The third part of the thesis, which includes the last two chapters, constitutes the core argument of the study. It is the analytical assessment of the correlation between political parties and their role in diluting and deepening of democratic institutions in Pakistan.

Findings

The study found that democracy in Pakistan was not bottom-up evolution but an accidental revolution from above in which the elite class found legitimate method to be in power; a classic case of “circulation of elite mass.” The democratisation of Pakistan was always an elitist project in which the masses were never associated. The nature of Pakistani democracy can be better explained by Joseph Schumpeter’s idea that it is an institutional arrangement in which individuals attain decisive power through the competitive procedure of voting. The struggle is for exercise of power rather than for the good of its people. The political parties and military leadership were the prime actors of this power struggle however with different methods.

Conclusion

It has to be recognised that, political parties despite their being not fully developed are the central political force serving as an instrument for public contestation by representing voters’ preferences through institutional mechanism. Currently, political parties are at the helm of power for the second consecutive term and have showed signs of maturity in continuing civilian rule. The very continuation of a civilian regime has generated hope for democratic consolidation, but political parties some time play foul and harm their own cause. Political parties still show tendencies to seek arbitration from the military in times of crisis which exhibits the weakness of their belief in the democratic system. Unless, political parties agree to the rules of the game and show patience and allow legitimate elected regimes to function, parties would remain vulnerable to the military’s dictates.