

Pakistan's Political Culture and New Electronic Media: A Case Study of Musharraf Era

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Abstract:

Electronic media has become vital in promoting democratic culture in Pakistan. The major impediments of the promotion of democratic values are dynastic political parties, corruption of the politicians, slackness of the judiciary and the bureaucracy, military intervention in politics. Media has started a debate that was long awaited on issues previously considered as taboos. It initially extended unwavering support to the issues of the individual who is weak and marginalized but later began to adjust with the power centers due to the political culture centered on the tiny elite that exploited common man since long. However, it has to adhere to the democratic values that provide it a conducive environment to flower and flourish.

Keywords: Electronic Media, Pakistan, Political Culture, Judiciary, Bureaucracy, Legislature, Military

I. Introduction

Media breathes the oxygen of facts as N.K. Verma opines (2006). Therefore, it is the information hungry department. It is considered as the fourth organ of the state, promotes political consciousness of the people indicating how issues are raised and make the government accountable. It shapes and assesses the current political circumstances and gauges its effects on individuals and the society by providing complete dependable information. The political culture of power and governance in Pakistan variably changed by electronic media. Political culture refers to the distinguishing beliefs, values, attitudes, habits and behavior patterns that characterize a political community. The present media revolution touching every facet of people's life, increasing their number of choices and providing them a medium to share their views and thoughts. The graphic real time reporting has involved the illiterate people to watch by using the sense of hearing and seeing who cannot read. It changes people's views about various national and international matters and provides the best opportunities for the right solution. The media in Pakistan fair degree of resilience over the last era, a notable development in the electronic section, particularly. Beside numerous newspapers, Periodical, one can now access to information and entertainment from hundred TV channels and uncountable approved or unlawful radio stations. Media has always been perceived in ruling groups as a possibly subverting institution and sometimes became the prey of oppressive force. However, it exerted influence and work as a catalyst for change the behavior of the state organs such as parliament, executive, the judiciary and to some extent establishment.

The field of media is not limited to any specific chastisement. David Nicholas (1997, p. 43) identified, "Newspaper covers every subject under the sun." Mass media i.e. radio television and newspaper all have information rich because these are the channels communicated figures, news, etc. to masses. Media practitioners are communicators of information. They have to gather news and information for communication. In modern democracies media beside with the three organ of the state (Executive, Legislature, and Judiciary) became the 4th organ it has again vital importance in democratic culture. Hijazi (1995) argues in his book, "*Mass Communication Theory and Practice*" that British philosopher John Stuart Mill trusted that: "It is a common belief that Press as" 4th Estate of the Govt." In the democracies, it is considered that "as every person has the right to be informed. "Therefore, everyone can use the right of vote with proper information that certainly comes through media that promotes the consciousness, regarding political economic and social subjects. Definitely, media has given a similar position, because it has become the strongest tools to form and deform the standing of a government. There are various types in media i.e., electronic media, print media, social media. The present study deals with the rise of electronic media and its impact of political culture. Javed Jabbar opines that "Communication with the people is necessary in any society and in any form of government." (Jabbar, J. 1997, P.23) The role and task of media is to inform and educate people so that a critical awareness of the problem is encouraged." (Bhattacharjee, 2005, p.5)

II. Theoretical Framework

Scholars have attempted to theorize media revolution and define its nature and working. In this regard the considerable theories are as follow that provides a scientific framework for understanding; Technological Determinism, Cultural Studies, Cultivation Theory, Social action theory and agenda setting theory. Technological Determinism defines that through the prism of technology people attempt to relate or interpret the world around them, as Marshall McLuhan opines (McLuhan, 2001). On the other hand, Marx as Max Weber argues (Weber, 1971) explains that Social behavior is determined by "Over determined causes." Social change is triggered by multiple causes like gender, race, and class. The *Cultivation Theory* defines that the more time people spend 'living in the television world, the more likely they are to believe social reality aligns with reality portrayed on television. "Another theory is social action that avers that human behavior relates to cause-effects in the social realm. It's an interaction between society and behavior. The last theory is agenda setting that interprets that social behavior can be changed through the ability of media by influencing to place the topic on agenda. It means that if a news item is covered frequently and prominently, the audience will regard the issue as more important. The agenda-setting seems to be pertinent to explain the role of media in Pakistani culture.

The term culture may be demarcated as "it is a refined behavior of people that is socially communicated from one generation to another generation. It involves knowledge, dogmas, outlooks, faith, morals and objects learnt and style of living of a group of people. These values and thinking are usually known by the members of given society and accepted from one generation to another. (Rod Hague, 2013) On the other hand, political culture describes the collective distinguishing thought of a society that characterized a political community (Macmillan, 1986). It also involves all the features of a culture. Thus, in other words "Political culture is a set of attitudes, beliefs and sentiments that give order and meaning to a political process and provides the underlying

assumptions and rules that govern behavior in the political system.”(Catalog, 2012)It’s an embodiment of subjective and psychological dimensions of politics and the product of history and political system and the histories of the members therefore, rooted equally in public events and private experience. (Sciences, 1968)

Media also has effects on political culture through process of socialization. Mass media delivers immediate information about political actions. A strong and controlled media system provides an influential force in shaping political attitudes and behaviors and can give a robust support to a totalitarian system. Direct relationships with political elites are also a powerful source that effect on political culture. (Gabriel A Almond, 1989)Media are (mostly) non state actors who define themselves apart from the state and from all other societal actors. Media can consist of everything from national newspapers to student magazines, global broadcasters to community radio, websites and blogs to social networks and virtual communities, citizen journalists to government mouthpieces. Beside print media, there exist print media that is widely read for news and analysis. On the other hand, Electronic Media” is those means of communication grounded on electromechanical or electronics means of communication. (Ahmad, 2015)It is touching every facet of life. The electronic media’s main functions are; to inform, educate, to amuse and to inspire public opinion by valid information, deliver education and awareness about political, economic and social problems, suggests solutions and changes public outlook on local, national and international issues.

III. Political Culture in Pakistan

In democratic societies media plays a very significant role on national and international matters in the formation of public opinion both in developed and developing societies. Democracy won pervasive acknowledgment in this century due to its institution, practice, standards, although this perception was there long before the era of Greeks. (Hall, 1999, P.24) In most of the developed societies it is effective fruitfully, because of their urbanization, industrialization, technical development, recent bureaucratization. Democracy failed after independence because Pakistan possessed a weak and fragmented political party that was unable to resolve key governing conflicts. (Maya, 2013) Democracy in Pakistan, however, has never been allowed to function properly. All of its previous democratic transitions have been aborted by military coup. (Shah A, 2014)The power brokers who play game of power politics are Bureaucracy, Parliament & Civil Elite, Judiciary and effective role of Military dominant in Pakistani political culture..

A. Military and Power Politics in Pakistan

The role of military establishment in the political sphere is realized in most of the states, however, in western democracies the military does not interfere in political matters. The trend of interference is recurrent in newly established states. Failure of civil and bureaucratic regimes make a political void that was filled by the more ordered force i.e. army. Since its inception, Field Marshal Ayub Khan established his rule over country till the fall of his government in 1969. His heir was General Yahya Khan who ruled from 1969 to 1971. Third military ruler of country was General Zia UIHaq from 1977 to 1989 that fought successful proxy war with the former USSR in Afghanistan and saved the integrity of Pakistan. General Pervez Musharraf propelled fourth military rule took political matters in his hands in 1999 ended in 2008. He had to face external threats but like General Zia he handled the Afghan crisis effectively when the United States in

reaction to the 9/11 incident decided to invade Afghanistan. (Gleditsch, 2007) However, despite the successes on external fronts and to some extent internal front, the military coups hampered the evolution of democracy. (Abbas, 2005).” (Abdullah, 1983 p.321) There are four ways of interference in the civil government by the military establishment;

- Using its influence in the country, the military establishment tries to affect the state affairs and policies;
- The military establishment tries to impose its policies by threatening with the use of undue power;
- Military establishment removes one cabinet and brings the other one, which is like a puppet in the hands of military establishment,
- Military establishment openly removes the civil government and gets hold of the state and becomes the supreme authority. Different ex-generals of military give different logic for the interference of the military establishment in the state affairs. As Robert La Porte says, “The proclamation of martial law is considered to be an indication of an emergency situation. In most societies it has been employed as a temporary measure, a device to govern during emergencies as natural disaster (earth quakes, floods or man-made disaster, civil disorders. (Laporte, 1985 p.55) When not in power, the military establishment has often used the media to cut the civilian government down to size. (Hameed Raza, 2002 p.106)

Parliament has necessary role in politics of Pakistan. Members of Parliament have an important role in formation the political culture of Pakistan, while, on the other hand their political performance symbolize the culture they fit in. How the Members of Parliament contribute in the change of Political Culture and democracy in Pakistan will be discussed. The judiciary is a part of the state mechanism. It consists of judges and magistrates. Function of judiciary is to decide legal disputes, interpret parliamentary laws, statutes and constitution. In some states judiciary is also accountable to interpret law while in some other states it is the duty of parliament. Experience shows that judgments of judges also depend upon the personality of judges. If he is an honest man his judgments will reflect the bent of mind. If he is dishonest, he cannot give justice to the people concerned. The constitution of 1973 provides that “Any Person who abrogates or attempts conspires, or abrogates, subverts to the constitution by use the force or by other unconstitutional means, shall be guilty of high treason” (Dawood J. M., 1994, p.17).

B. Media in Relation to Political Culture of Pakistan

In current years, private sector ads have fairly decreased the level of dependence on state funding. Zuhair Siddiqi, saw that ‘government could, almost always, find backing for its action against a newspaper in one section or another. The funding was extended in the name of “national interest, the glory of Islam, the ideology of Pakistan” or some other mundane consideration’. Actually, within the first seven years after liberation (1947–1953), in the Punjab province alone, 31 newspapers were proscribed for varying periods of time. Ayub Khan embattled, journalists and newspapers supposed to be sympathetic towards Marxism. The first prey was the Progressive Papers Limited (PPL), a left-wing publication house that controlled *Imroze* and the *Pakistan Times*. Under the Pakistan Security Act of 1952, PPL was taken over by the military leadership and renamed National Press Trust in 1964.

The Press and Publication Ordinance (PPO) was publicized in 1960, and then amended in 1963, with the intention to strengthen penalties against wayward publications. It was a tool to threaten all those related with the publication process – from the media owner to the printer. The government in 1961 seized control of the news agency, **Associated Press of Pakistan (APP)**, at a time when only a few newspapers could afford to have correspondents throughout Pakistan, and even rarer of them overseas. Zia-ul-Haq, enforced even more punitive legal actions to confirm that the influence of the military and radical clerics was not defied. Benazir Bhutto made promises to restore the credibility of the media, ambitiously announcing that her government ‘will abolish all the laws and rules which go against the liberty of the press. Allocation of newsprint by the state was discontinued by Benazir Bhutto’s government in April 1989 in favor of free access at market prices.

Nawaz Shrief started a conflict with the Jang group, which had refused to give him absolute backing. Mir Shakil-ur-Rahman became the target of political persecution through freezing of the bank accounts of the group, withholding of newsprint imports and tax controls. Using recurrent change of regimes during the 1990s, military establishment got the chance to disrepute an immature politician and paved the way for its reoccurrence to power with the coup achieved by General Pervez Musharraf in October 1999. In 2002, the new channels were managed by the **Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA)**, under the Ministry of Information. Its role was to enforce a code of conduct to safeguard the quality of the programs. Destabilized by the TV coverage of the protest of lawyers, following the sacking of Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry in March 2007, Musharraf decided to revise PEMRA to enable the check of diffusion rights of private TV channels and the seizure of their equipment. (Dawn, 2007) Musharraf, who has taken great pride in opening the doors to private TV channels, did not then measure how difficult it would be to rein in these new political actors. His successor, Asif Ali Zardari, had also to accept that no channel can be shut down without negative consequence.

Talk shows become a major source to influence political debate in the country. Editors were attracted to the electronic media due to elevated salaries and made their mark successfully through their talk shows (Talat Hussain, Hamid Mir, Shahid Masood, Kamran Khan, etc.). In addition to seven religious channels, religious programs are common on other channels projecting dogmatic content without addressing the intellectual challenges posed by modern world. (Zaheer, 2013) This situation protects the clergy from condemnation and leaves the field open to individuals espousing extremist positions. These Parliamentarians often complain that anchors distort their image with fake facts for the lead of the rival politicians.¹

C. 9/11 and Media

After the tragedy of 9/11 Musharraf regime took many important decisions on foreign policies issues and in the same way initiated radical policy changes in domestic affairs. These initiatives were devolution plan 2000, curbing of extremism and terrorism, proscribing militant organizations to make the image of Pakistan better in international community. Among these decisions the most significant was the freedom of media.

¹An Islamic social network site, ‘Millat Facebook’, was launched in May 2010 after the Lahore High Court temporarily banned Facebook on charge of blasphemy but has since been facing financial bankruptcy.

Particularly, electronic media gained un-precedent independence and assumed a new role in changing political culture in Pakistan. Electronic media proved very significant in the promotion of democratic culture and the revival of parliamentary government in Pakistan after Musharraf era. It worked as an instrument to check and balance government policies by promoting public opinion and enhancing political awareness with a culture of dialogue. However, it follow the lines of the government on issues of national interests, like Kashmir and sectarian issue and started and hastened the dialogue on long standing problems. Media played a role of a watch dog on the performance of the legislature, judiciary and the executive branch in Pakistan. It also played a role of critical mass over the policies of executive branch with its critical analysis with live talk shows. **Talk shows** in Pakistani media proved to be the most powerful arm of electronic media. Media helped in strengthening political and other institutions after Musharraf regime. It brings forth the performance of the institutions, good or bad. The menace of corruption is so deep rooted in Pakistan that pointing out such mega scandals made the media vulnerable to a wave of violence, as the Bureau Chief ARY Multan RanaShahid became the victim of violence himself when he reported a local land grabbers having political party backing. On the National scene, that task remained challenging when faced Musharraf's NRO to legitimize the corruption of political parties. The most controversial role played why Jang group, Geo TV network. The very popular talk show is Capital Talk whose anchor Hamid Meer aired very controversial programs against our security forces. Such programs are not in line with our national cause and interest. They should realize their national responsibility.

The legislature is consisted on our politicians who are elected with the due process election under the umbrella democracy. They are supposed to work for the welfare of the people belongs to their constituencies as well as national interest. It is also a politically motivated decision by the chairman AbsaarAlam. Legislature must review the PEMRA's policies. The 3rd pillar of the government is judiciary. It is not exaggeration to claim that the major beneficiary of the media remained judiciary. Musharraf fired Chief Justice of Pakistan Mr. Justice Iftikhar Ahmad Ch.: that was quiet un-constitutional decision. The significant support came with lawyers was media. Media particularly electronic media played a very vital role in restoration of judiciary that finally in-turn paved the way to the restoration of the democracy. The traditional major political parties like PML (N), PPP are based on dynastic politics. They are personality-centered organizations. They claimed they are democratic parties but actually they are authoritative in their structure. Among the journalists Rauf Klassra made special focus in his program at DUNYA TV on the powerful role of bureaucracy. However, this institution is still less visible on the media screen, therefore, less vulnerable to criticism and accountability.

IV. Conclusion

In a developed democratic political culture, the perception of media is the Fourth pillar of the state. The democratic values cannot promote and strengthen without vigilant and effective media. The main duty of the media is to play a role of a civil society that makes people well aware politically, therefore, they enable themselves for a better opinion about the state matters and can take good decisions while exercising their right of vote. In this way, they are able to choose appropriate candidates who in turn run the helm of affairs in the benefit of the people. The relation of media with democratic culture in Pakistan now has become a relation of intimacy. The democratic system of governance

with constitutional guarantees provides the right of freedom of expression. The right is the basis of media independency. The official controlled media cannot offer a critical view of the issues and quick response to events which private media did. It, therefore, unravel the path towards modern democratic political culture which previously was closed, limited and narrow in its outlook. It includes the dynastic political parties, which are in essence authoritative, traditional oppressing military against democracy, judiciary that was executive dominated, and a passive inactive legislature unable to address the challenges and unwilling to be changed in favor of the people rather only serving the interest of tiny ruling elite. Socially, the dominant culture was in favor of the feudalism and the capitalists. There was a mode of democracy working apparently for the common man but in reality serving the haves. However, the inclusion of electronic media changed the traditional dynamics of the political culture in Pakistan. The dynastic political parties all of a sudden exposed to the critical media unimaginable for them to be answerable before the public in such a way.

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