

## **The Politics of Corruption and Its Impact on Democracy in Pakistan (1988-1999)**

Bakhtiar Khan, Saeed Ahmad, Arif Khan\*

### **Abstract**

Pakistan, an important state in South Asia, is known for its unstable democracy. Pakistan and its institutions have gained less familiarity with democracy as its 70 years history has been experiencing with half military and half, the so called, democratic rule. The craze of power politics among politicians have reverted the state machinery to mal-practices and corruption. The post General Zia period aroused sentiments for the revival of democracy in the country. It was hoped that Pakistan would become fully democratic onward. But the expectations did not last long. The menace of corruption, favouritism, misuse of public office, retaliatory politics, supporting party loyalists' etc. could not materialize the idea in true sense. This paper argues that democracy and democratic institutions in Pakistan could not strengthen as the politicians and political elites have preferred their personal interest over the welfare of the masses as well as of the state. This paper highlights the democratic period of 1988-1999, in the perspective of politician's involvement in corrupt practices and abuse of public offices which had overshadowed the desired goal of full democratization. To answer these, archival sources supplemented by secondary sources are consulted in this paper.

**Key Words:** Politicians, Corruption, Political Parties, Democratization, Pakistan Peoples, Party and Pakistan Muslim League (N).

### **Introduction**

#### **Politics and Corruption in Pakistan**

*Man's capacity for evil makes democracy necessary and man's capacity for good makes democracy possible* (Dawn, February 23, 1989).

Certainly, preferred system of governance not only in Western world but also in rest of the world is democracy. Here the people participate in political process by using their lawful right to vote, and elect their representatives to govern. Thus, they empower their elected representatives to hold public offices and make reasonable and legitimate decisions to run the affairs of state. Once empowered, these representatives remain accountable for their policies and actions. While at the same time, the system also empowers the masses to take away the power of their representatives if they fall short of

popular aspirations, redressing public grievances and delivering good governance.

As far as Pakistan is concerned, it has the same version of parliamentary democracy and representatives system. But unfortunately, once come to power, these representatives nauseatingly violate the mandate for material gains and vested interests. They fully enjoy the perks of public offices and shatter all hopes of public by neglecting their problems and distresses. Quirk of fate is that the same group of dominant class gets elected repeatedly. Regrettably, the public due to their ignorance, extreme poverty and lack of influence become trading pawns in the hands of the dominant class. Resultantly this class ransacks public wealth through every possible means of corruption which results in poor governance.

The term corruption has variously been defined by the writers in different contexts and perspectives. Stockemer has termed it as the misuse of public office for personal benefits (Daniel, Bernadette & Lyce, 2012). Stanislaus And reski who also termed it as 'kleptocracy' and demarcated that when public office is preferred for personal gains rather for national and resulting in the breach of rules and regulations which are nominally enforced (Faisal, 2007). Similarly, Huntington termed it as the behaviour of public officials which deviates them from accepted norms in order to serve private ends (Samuel, 1968). He also added that generals and revolutionaries are not a threat to democracies but have contempt for it. Actually, these are politicians and other groups who win elections, gain the highest authority and then manipulate the system of democracy to curtail or destroy it (Samuel, 1991).

It is noteworthy that all sorts of malpractices such as favouritism, horse-trading, bribery, illegal obligations and other forms of corruption are very common among our politicians. This article is an attempt to review the state of democracy, political parties and corruption during 1988-99, in Pakistan. How did the misuse of public office, particularly in Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif's tenure, frustrated democracy in Pakistan? There are serious allegations of misuse of power and money making on each other from both parties leaders which virtually hampered the smooth functioning of democracy and caused long lasting political instability (Faisal, 2007).

Generally, the Pakistani politicians are criticised on the ground that after having attained the highest authority they follow undemocratic practices and favouritism which compelled them for the misuse of public

offices. Resultantly, corruption and misuse of public resources by politicians for their own benefits remained a persistent dilemma in the democratic history of Pakistan. The succeeding governments during their terms in office failed to show maturity and to put the country on the right track. They always preferred their own selves over institutions. They cared but little for democracy. On one hand, lack of political training for party workers, lack of accountability and absence of intra-party democracy; while on the other hand, ignorance, hunger and lack of political consciousness on the part of masses have weakened the nascent democratic setup. These and many other factors have substantially contributed to the worsening state of democracy in Pakistan.

### **The Governance of Benazir Bhutto**

Benazir Bhutto inherited the leadership of Pakistan People's Party (PPP) in a young age where she possessed too little capacity to head a political party which needs extra calibre. In the general elections of 1988, PPP got simple majority of 92 seats in the House of 207. After the announcement of the official results, she was sworn in as ever-first female prime minister of Pakistan (Rathnam, 1991). She had to confront many challenges. Besides ministers, many advisors and special assistants were appointed in order to help her. She not only consulted her advisors and assistants but also kept them on board. After some time she started gripping in herself everything and the style of governance became authoritative. Decision making moved from the political team (Cabinet) to the Prime Minister's secretariat. The pattern of governance became personalized rather than democratized. This adventurism weakened political administration which virtually erupted cleavages among various institutions; especially Presidency and military (Hamid, 1999).

Henry Carey further augmented the statement that her administration became victim at the hands of her family members. The weak administration needed sincerity and loyalty from the members of in-and-out doors. But unfortunately, the in-door members further aggravated the scenario. Her husband as well as her father in law turn into an organizer of an array of bagmen, collected fees on loans, assigned contracts on kickbacks and issued licenses and work permits to party workers and beneficiaries. She promised to stop the interference of her husband and father in law in administration but it was too little and too late. Furthermore, her government was also alleged for bribery, misuse of state authority, supporting party

workers and other relatives unlawfully. There was also a strong allegation against her that she persuaded the Assembly's members, especially belonging to opposition block, not to support the '*Islami Jamhoori Ittehad*' (IJI) no confidence motion tabled on November 01, 1989. For this purpose she lavishly distributed public money among them (Rathnam, 1991). Similarly, members of the Senate were also influenced as the party lacked majority in the House (Sartaj, 2009). Like her father, she was also blamed for corrupting the country by entrenching its feudal character and converting government institutions as tools for the arbitrarily use of authority (Farzana, 2009). For instance, the appointment of Nusrat Bhutto and Hakim Ali Zardari, as Senior Minister without portfolio and Chairman of the Parliamentary Public Accounts Committee respectively; were regarded as ill-advised nepotism and a test case for her authoritarian administration. Apart from it, large-scale political induction in the Civil Services of Pakistan was also recorded. The motive behind such large scale induction was to get the support of bureaucracy in long run. On the other hand, to take revenge of all those whom she considered had worked against her father were dismissed. Furthermore, she could neither provide an environment conducive to her ruling-party, to show credibility, nor could share powers with her coalition partners Mutahida Qaumi Movement (MQM). Resultantly the worries of coalition partner increased and decided to quit the government in October 1989 (Bakhtiar, 2015).

### **IJI and MQM – Gathering Storm against PPP**

The establishment, along with the IJI, had played an encouraging role in diverting the MQM loyalties from the government to the political opponents (Hasan, 1998). Nawaz Sharif, the IJI leader had to take advantage of the unstable political conditions set about making deals and promising patronage. His movements were often described as secret, but he was reported as moving between Lahore, Murree and Islamabad, where the members of the National Assembly (MNAs) had been won over through various lucrative offers, were kept under close watch. Even the top leadership of PPP did not know about many of these moves until they were made public in the press. For example, an IJI agreement with the MQM in September 1989 came as a surprise to the PPP when it was later announced that 14 MQM MNAs had agreed to vote with the opposition (Lawrence, 1990). PPP leaders had clung to the view that the Sind-based MQM could ill afford to break its ties with the dominant party in the province. MQM manoeuvres, however,

were predicated on maximizing possibilities where-ever they could be found for what they deemed a neglected segment of the citizenry. The political activity at the eve of no-confidence motion was a new understanding for most of Pakistanis, long starved by continued phases of military rule. The system of buying votes of MNAs had never been seen on such a large scale and the volume of currency spent in acquiring or holding allegiances was recorded to be in the billions of rupees(Lawrence, 1990).

### **Democracy, Weak Governance and Corrupt Outlook**

Democracy, under a weak government, always explodes problems with more far reaching consequences. Besides, corruption, the abuse of public office and the crisis of governance have always close links and have led to weak democratic system and this is what happened during the period under review. In developing societies, corruption exists on two fold mechanisms. At first, purely financial; and secondly, favouritism and below-merit mechanism. Pakistan's political culture has been suffered from both sorts of corruption. As far as the PPP governments in the said period is concerned, they not only failed to control the menace of corruption rather became an epi-centre of the menace. During the first two years of PPP government, several party members and political appointees were accused of corruption (The Nation, March 7, 1990).This aroused popular feeling that bribery and private dealing for one's own benefits were the aim of running the machinery of government. Government policies, decisions and contract negotiations, especially all those initiatives regarding the denationalization turned out to be doubtful and reduced the government's ability to carry out its developmental projects. This increased the worries of the masses about the performance of government and the later was unable to fulfil the demands and expectations of the former. Benazir Bhutto denied all such allegations of male-practices against herself and PPP. Later on, she reluctantly admitted the allegations and said that her weak and fragile position in legislature would neither allow her to control nor would take risk to alienate her lieutenants. Besides other parliamentarians, her husband was labelled with grave charges of corruption and extortion. When she remained unable to overcome the menace as well as her lieutenants, corruption haunted her status as well as the image of her party.

### **Factors Responsible for Corruption**

Faisal Khan, in his article bearing title "*Corruption and the Declined of State in Pakistan*", has mentioned many factors which have shaken the very

foundations of the developing society (Faisal, 2007). Among others, the following three important factors collectively opened politics to its nefarious influence.

1. The weak and feeble positions of political parties;
2. Feudal elites control over their constituencies and;
3. No clear-cut mechanism to stop floor crossing among political parties (Sayyed, 1992).

The available data reveal that the weak and feeble position of PPP coupled with the absence of a strong organizational structure of opposition parties, especially IJI; had encouraged national as well as provincial assemblies' members to function, freely. They did not take care for party loyalty and rules regulations. In the same way, the feudal elite class, who were the master of their constituencies, used their resources for themselves and cared little for the parties they were members of. Furthermore, parties had no proper check and balance system upon their members which ultimately encouraged the culture of floor crossing at any stage. The ever-increasing culture of horse trading among politicians gradually tarnished Pakistan's politics. It not only stained and weakened PPP but also jolted IJI to an extent. This state of wholesale dealings for control encapsulated both the parties, who had to keep an eye on the opportunists for their support and was compelled to turn a blind eye to the inappropriate conducts of their own members for fear of losing their support (Sayyed, 1992). These factors greatly contributed to undermine the politics of the country to a game of numbers wherein money and the use of power were instrumental to determine political loyalties and the coalitions of parliamentary representatives replacing issues of vital national importance.

### **Benazir Bhutto' Politics and Misuse of Public Money**

During her first tenure as Prime Minister, Benazir Bhutto had sought to persuade independent as well as IJI parliamentarians with lucrative financial offers. The strategy was unsuccessful with the strong counter policy of IJI to match PPP's offers with deals (Sayyed, 1992). Huge amount of money changed hands, and high-handed manoeuvres were applied by the political parties to convince and get the vote and favour of uncooperative members. The voting on no-confidence motion was to take place a week later. Both PPP and IJI as stated above were completely clouded with doubts and uncertainty as they had to keep them in strictly guarded places, to reduce the chances of changing their loyalties before monetary offers or pressure tactics. The

streets of Islamabad were strictly protected with Army to ensure the availability of members to the Nationality Assembly on the polling day. As the day was crucial for the PPP but the opposition IJI was also struggling to its utmost. Neither of the party was in strong position because the battle was not fought based on loyalty but it was corruption which dominated the whole process. The party in government was thus left to the mercy of elected members because the amount of money can determine the fate of government and democracy thus the machinery of government was reduced to unnecessary quarrels which had nothing to do with the problems the country was facing. Apart from it, holding the coalition partners intact remained increasingly expensive affair for both the parties. This state of affair at the top most level disentangled the common man from the politics and democracy of the country. The nostalgia for the military regime so soon after its demise could hardly bode well for the prospects of democracy in Pakistan. The President Ghulam Ishaq Khan at the occasion of his address to the nation on August 6, 1990, cited numerous charges of corruption and abuse of public office against the government of Benazir Bhutto (Sayyed, 1992).

The Special Courts for Speedy Trial Ordinance 1990, promulgated by President Ghulam Ishaq Khan and the activation of other laws including the Holders of Representative Offices (Prevention of Misconduct) Act and the Parliament and Provincial Assemblies Act. These Ordinances and decrees offered a backdrop for the assault particularly on PPP leadership and supporters. Benazir Bhutto was accused for allotting more than five hundred expensive Islamabad based plots to the party ministers and members of the National Assembly at very cheap prices and also of using such gifts to win the favor of provincial assembly members in the North West Frontier Province (now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa)(Lawrence, 1991). During the second term of PPP government in 1994, Benazir Bhutto had the same old mind-set to control the entire four provinces of the federation. She offered benefits to the independent members and ministers of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province for obtaining heir loyalties. The task did not accomplish here as she also tried to gain control over Punjab Assembly as well. These endeavors served to blemish Benazir Bhutto's and her party's reputation and also adversely affected the functioning of the political system. Similarly, she also denounced Nawaz Sharif for the same political maneuvering when he was the Prime Minister. In the nutshell, it is analyzed that in the said period the same undemocratic political maneuvering was adopted by the ruling elites both PPP's and Muslim League's leadership(Lawrence, 1991).

Tariq Ali pen-pointed high level of corruption and the consistent decay of governmental institutions had become an alarming issue. This widespread corruption among politicians intensely affected all the institutions of the country (Tariq, 2008). The need to get and retain the backing of likeminded civil officers in bureaucracy led successive regimes into pleasing high-ranking officials as well. Even the military did not remain untouched with some of those responsible for arms acquisitions following the pattern. Most importantly, such corrupt practices were practiced quite openly. The rampant corruption resulted in frequent change of government alternating between PPP and ML. In the period of 1988-96, there was no sustained and targeted planning for national development which eventually resulted in the failure of Pakistani democracy (Samina, 2007). Tariq Ali further noted that during her second term, President Farooq Laghari had appealed Benazir to stop her husband and several other ministers who were out of control. Zardari, stubborn as always in defence of his material interests taunted the President. "Nobody in Pakistan, he said, including Leghari, was entirely clean. The threat was obvious you touch us and we will expose you" (Tariq, 2008).

With all these factors especially, mismanagement of the financial resources of the state, the foreign investment gradually declined. The Transparency International placed Pakistan one among the most corrupt countries in the world which caused severe impairment to Pakistan's standing as an investment friendly country. Other such reasons which discredited the government were the accusations of corruption and lack of transparency associated with the deal of United Bank, in April 1996. The sale of 26% of Pakistan Telecommunications for an unlimited period was postponed (Far Eastern Economic Review, 1992). Among other things International Monetary Fund (IMF) also showed reluctance to release fund to support Pakistan, had further increased economic problem. The Foreign Exchange Reserves dropped down to nominal level. In such a scenario, on the one side to run state machinery and on the other side to cover expenditures, the PPP government was compelled to take loan with high interest rate. Resultantly, the financial situations as stated, reached to its critical level. In light of such financial insecurity it was speculated that search for alternative to PPP government had been started by the establishment. They had planned a list of top technocrats and bankers to be the part of next government. Thus, the subject of speculation was a new interim set up comprising technocrats. Political figures were gravely labelled as dishonest and a self-centred creature. Another reason that led to the early demise of PPP government was

no vision of its leader to take the problem of crippled national economy and a program to resolve the problems of governance. Because of her indulgence in other fronts, for example, the ethnic tension in Sindh, tension with the President and with the opposition, she was unable to spare time to such problems of Pakistan. Benazir Bhutto and her spouse had to deal with persistent accusations of corruption all over the 1990s. The print media in 1996 highlighted a scandal blaming Benazir Bhutto's husband has bought \$4 million Rockwood Mansion, in Surrey, London. In addition to it \$1.5 million had spent on its renovation. Her strong associates maintained that Benazir's political position was misused by her husband and that he was not a just man (Bakhtiar, 2018).

Her political rival, Nawaz Sharif, revealed publicly that Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto was involved in banking fraud that forced President Farooq Leghari to take steps against her and her husband (Muhammad, Hasan & Saurabh, 2008). Similarly, she tried to pack the judiciary with likeminded men, many among them were unqualified judges. She also filled the vacant posts in Supreme Court with ad'hoc judges. With these and many other moves, she tried to damage the true sense of independence of judiciary. In the following days, she got herself in trouble when Chief Justice of Pakistan turned down the appointment which she had already done violating merit (Ravi, 2011). Such policies and scandals contributed to her bad management and finally her government was again dismissed in 1996 (Muhammad, 2006).

### **Nawaz Sharif Era and Malpractices**

Nawaz Sharif entered into the governing machinery of Pakistan in 1985 on various positions and had twice remained as Prime Minister. He introduced a unique style of governance in the country contrary to democratic norms such as high positions in government were given to family members and relatives (Mashriq, June 17, 2017). In the 1988 general elections, it was the establishment which distributed large sum of money among the different political parties to create IJI to undermine the popularity of PPP (Dawn, February 7, 2008). In the 1990 general elections, IJI got majority with the help and support of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and formed government under Nawaz Sharif. The government of Nawaz Sharif twice, during the decade from 1988 to 1999, were not free from the misuse of public office for personal gains and corruption. ML leadership left no stone unturned to benefit itself and weakened PPP position. Prior to 1990 general elections, the pro-Nawaz Sharif Punjab caretaker government provided handsome amount

to candidates, who contested elections from his party platform, to sponsor their election campaigns against PPP candidates. In Punjab, he made large-scale transfers and placed his own men to manipulate elections in his favour. Besides these, public transport was used to support IJI elections campaigns. Attempt was also made to change the territorial setting of constituencies in order to scatter the PPP vote bank. Cash money was distributed among voters in return for votes and constructions of roads, bridges and streets were materialized over nights. Furthermore, the PPP supporters were persuaded and restricted from voting and were forced either not to vote or vote for independent candidates to weaken PPP position in the elections (Inayatullah, 1997).

According to results declared by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), IJI swept polls with 105 seats in the 1990 general elections. Nawaz sworn in as the Prime Minister of Pakistan and Benazir Bhutto became opposition leader in the Parliament. In the beginning, Nawaz announced that his government would keep opposition on board to achieve national harmony and integrity. He gradually turned towards retaliatory politics against PPP through accountability; the judiciary was directed to investigate cases of corruption against Benazir Bhutto. Besides, his government also dismissed all those employees who were appointed during PPP government. Following the policy of retaliation, Nawaz Sharif filed two references against Benazir Bhutto, involving favours granted on a government contract and the appointment of a consultant, under the Article Four of the Parliament and Provincial Assemblies Disqualification of Membership Ordinance 1977 (Lawrence, 1991). Instead of conciliatory politics, IJI indulged itself in undemocratic measures which further taxed the government's ability to formulate constructive policies and strengthened democratic norms and values. All those measures which had defamed the PPP governments were taking its roots in Nawaz's government.

For instance, in August 1991, IJI was alleged of approving unlawful borrowing of some Rs.1.2 billion from government owned cooperatives in Punjab by the Ittefaq Industrial Group, which belongs to the Sharif family. Both, prime minister and his brother, Mian Shahbaz Sharif and close political advisors were directly implicated in the transactions which caused the collapse of many cooperatives, and the loss of Rs.17 billion to some two million people (Sayyed, 1992). The Cooperative Societies and bank of credit scandal unclothed the corruption of PML (N) which further destabilized the

tottering democracy in Pakistan which appeared in 1992. There were irregularities of hundreds of millions in this scheme (Mashriq, July 29, 2017). The Yellow Taxi Scheme, initiated in Nawaz's first term as Prime Minister, was characterized as one of the worst decisions undertaken by his administration. It was intended to benefit educated unemployed and the lower segment of society. The Scheme started with the purpose to reduce unemployment and increase job opportunities among the unemployed population of the country. They were allowed to import cars but this scheme was misused by those in power. Mostly high-ranking officers would import these taxis in the name of underprivileged people but retain them for personal use which seriously tainted the scheme with the allegations of corruption.<sup>1</sup>

Irshad Ahmad Arif and Fawad Chaudhry, in TV Talk Shows "*On The Other Side*" and "*To The Point*" respectively, criticised that Nawaz Sharif started Motor Way project in which he took huge sum of money as commission which were taken out of the country through money laundering (Irshad, 2017). The amount of this commission in motorway project was about eight hundred crore and cases against Nawaz Sharif in the import of Urea Fertilizer from China is also pending in which he took also huge sum of money as commission (Fawad, 2017).

### **Conclusion**

Being a developing democracy, Pakistan's political system has always been victimized by diverse obstacles. Every obstacle was more destructive for its democratic system than the other in letter as well as in spirit. Although these hurdles were not natural in real sense but were self-created with the passage of time. The political elites of Pakistan and high ranking officials always preferred their personal interest instead of national one. Their materialistic approach was either confined to personal, family or regional level and, therefore, back-door mechanism was adopted for legal and illegal gains. Among other reasons, corruption and misuse of public offices for personal gains remained daunting issues which not only victimized democracy but also retarded the growth of Pakistan as stable economic power. The governments

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<sup>1</sup>Initially the criteria were twelve years of education but later on it was dropped to matriculation. These cabs include 16000 Suzuki Mehran and 4000 Bolan which were to be distributed through balloting. Now big corruption was seen the scheme as many of the successful candidates were waiting for their taxis which they have got through balloting but the government said that all the taxis have been finished. These yellow cabs were given to their favourites on political basis.

of Benazir Bhutto after the 1988 general elections and that of Nawaz Sharif in the later years were hoped to be the revival of democracy in the country but the enthusiasm proved fruitless. Both the Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif governments during 1988-1999 were removed on the grounds of misconduct, inefficiency and corruption which virtually overshadowed the growth of democracy in Pakistan.

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