

The Ways to Strengthen Democracy in 21st Century Shazia Kiyani*

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Abstract:

This paper focuses on the weaknesses of different democracies of the world in 21st century and suggests some solutions to them. Among the living democracies of the world all of them are not exemplary and among the mediocre ones too all of them are not too bad. Some of the countries are justifying with the splendid principle of democracy and leaving the examples of good governance, self reliance, supremacy of Law and Rule of Equality for the rest of the world. On the other hand some of the countries are still striving hard to establish or retrieve the democracy. We need an ideal of democracy which renders it possible to access to what degree a world government serving a sovereign world parliament could be democratic and independent in order to be prosperous and capable of standing on its own feet in the 21st century. A strong democratic system of government is the only way out for the self reliance and stability of the country. This paper is aimed to identify the problems faced by today's democratic countries and their solution.

Keywords: Democracy, politics, dictatorship, elections, rule of Law, political Parties, moral and social behavior, democratic power.

1. Brief introduction and Contextual Analysis:

Ever since the last 70 years the number of democracies in the world has multiplied dramatically. There are currently 123 democratic countries in the world or as few as 80 depending on how one counts. Deciding how to count is crucial to some extent. It includes specification of what we mean by the term "Democracy", analyzing the degree of global democratic progress, considering whether democracy will continue to expand in that country or not? And determining what factors will shape the viability of the many new democracies that have come into being.[1]

Democracy may be a word familiar to most, but it is a concept still misunderstood and misused at a time when dictators, single-party regimes, and military coup leaders alike assert popular support by claiming the mantle of democracy. Yet the power of the democratic idea has prevailed through a long and turbulent history, and democratic government, despite continuing challenges, continues to evolve and flourish throughout the world. The word

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Democracy is derived from the Greek word “Demos” which means “People” and “Kratew” which means “To Rule” therefore the literal translation of the word Democracy is “Rule by the people.” [2]

The definition of Democracy is not static and absolute one. It has been growing, changing and grooming with the passage of time. In the simplest and most common way it is expressed as the power of the people to choose the government only and even this definition of Democracy is evident for its effectiveness for good governance, effective control and monitoring, preservation of human rights, accountability, safety and peace. According to the remarkable phrase of President Abraham Lincoln, “Democracy is government of the people, by the people, and for the people”.

The author in [3] observes that,

“The era since the Second World War has been the largest experiment with democracy in human history. Before 1900 only a handful of nations might have been considered democracies. Their number increased to about twenty after 1920, but the events surrounding the Great Depression overwhelmed several of these (including Weimar Germany, Austria, and Estonia). Since the early 1950s, however, new opportunities have been offered for the study of democracy. The greater number of democracies, the long period without a general international war, and the appearance of sophisticated techniques of research and analysis have made it possible to develop and test new theories of the political process and its consequences in democratic settings.”

Democracy is not a static subject. It is growing, grooming and flourishing with the passage of time. Social scientists are presenting innovative ideas to make it more practicable. The emerging concept of “Liberal Democracy” is a topic of much discussion and research today. The social scientists are trying to explain this concept by proving it to be the best system of government in future. When liberalism and democracy are combined in a way that the privilege and respect is given to the democracy by conferring to it conceptual and moral priority and allowing it to determine the limits of Liberalism. So it can be concluded that the Liberal Democracy is the democracy which is to be highlighted and defined within the framework of liberalism. Depending on the history, traditions and social structure the liberal democracy takes different forms in different societies, however several basic features are common to them all and define their conception of the good society. There are three basic features of Liberal Democracy which can be summarized as following;

1. Society consists of individuals and refers to the totality of them and their relationships with one another.
2. In Liberal Democracies all human beings share a common nature, thoughts and certain common interests. These interests are according to the nature of the human beings and universal in their nature.
3. The Liberal Democratic state represents a homogeneous legal space within which its citizens move freely and enjoy identical basic rights irrespective of where they are settled. All citizens are equally subject to the laws applied to them and those laws are also same to them.

These three prominent features of Liberal Democracy play a crucial part in defining the ideals of Liberal Democracies. The concept of Liberal Democracy still has to face a lot in order to flourish and progress. [4]

The author in the book “The future of Democracy” denotes the democracy as “Social Democracy”. [5]

After the downfall of Saddam Hussain, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, Hosni Mubarak, and Muammar al-Qaddafi many dictatorships or non-democratic governments abolished from the map of the world leaving behind a notion of revolution and change. Now other authoritarian leaders in the Middle East/North Africa regions are being pressurized by outer or inner sides to quit with their authoritative rule. The series of this change indicates that democratic change tends to occur in conjunction as Huntington had said in this famous “Waves of Democracy”. [6]

The authors H Strand, H Hegre, S Gates, & M Dahlfurther write in their article:

“Democratization indeed occurs in waves. We argue that transitions are best analyzed in small steps, and define change to political systems accordingly. Our small Steps measure precisely reflect the waves identified by Huntington. We use this precise measure to show that the wave structure can be traced back to a set of general patterns: (1) Economic development functions as a slowly changing backdrop to democratization; (2) the internal consistency of institutions initially prevents change, but opens up for series of changes as soon as this consistency is broken; (3) the neighborhood of a country exerts a forceful pull on the setup of its political system, resulting in a clustering of changes in similar directions; (4) newly formed states tend to be more democratic than otherwise similar states, so that clustered formation of states gives rise to clustered changes to global democracy; (5) new democracies are frequently nonsustainable, so that clustered state formation creates subsequent reverse waves. Huntington's waves are adequate descriptions of the historical patterns of democratization. Although the notion of waves is widely accepted, their existence is contested by scholars such as Przeworski et al. (2000) and Doorenspleet (2000b).” [7]

2. The basic principles and rules concerning Democracy:

After grasping the nature and meaning of democracy literally and practically, it is crucial to indicate the basic principles and rules which are considered as criteria to judge the democracy of that existing political system. Some of these important principles are as following.

1. The democratic system must include all members of the society into its political and governmental set up. Direct and indirect participation of all members of that specific nation is fundamental to establish a democratic system.
2. Every person must be given the freedom of speech, press, assembly, and organization in the democratic process. Every member of the society should be given full liberty and chance to choose its representatives of his choice and he should also be given the full liberty to present himself as a candidate in order to be elected or rejected during the election process. Chance to choose to represent and to assemblage should be given on equal footing to everyone.
3. Free and fair competitive elections are the essence of democratic political system. Leaders and opposition must be selected for a specific period of time. The countries where the election process is not free and fair can not claim to be a truly democratic state, representing the true will of the majority of that state.

4. Good governance is the backbone of the state affairs. Only those political democracies flourish and prosper which observe and follow the principles of good governance. No matter how democratic one country claims to be it will no longer be able to sustain if it is not governed well , sooner or later it will collapse or will be dependant upon others, even to run its domestic affairs.
5. Educated and well aware nation is required in order to form a true democratic state because only educated people can better know their rights and responsibilities.
6. Cooperation and balance of power between the three pillars of government, the executive, judiciary and legislature is essential to insure the smooth working of every democratic system.
7. The system of political parties must be strong and organized in order to formulate better representation which is competent enough to represent the interests of the members of the society.
8. More and more people must participate as voters in the competitive elections in order to represent and safeguard the interest of the majority.
9. The elected parliament is supposed to guarantee that there is no oppression of the minority by the majority. The parliament must reach at the “Right” decision.

3. The Ways to strengthen the Democracy:

Now in the light of the basic principles of democracy some of the major flaws and irregularities in different democracies of the world will be discussed with the remedies available for them. It will also be analyzed that how those incomplete, unsuccessful and paralyzed democracies can turn into successful democracies. And how democracy can present it to be a model form of government? Acting upon the aforesaid elements of democracy is essential in order to create a sound democratic political and governmental system.

The first element to indicate the weakness of a democratic system is the bad voting attribute of the people living in that specific territory. In weak democracies the citizens of these nations themselves or with the aid of any foreign help organize and arrange the competitive elections. By this way they become capable of selecting their representatives. During election process the ratio of the voting turn out and the number of votes are not same all over the world. In some of these nations this system is working successfully and perfectly whereas in some it is satisfactory somehow with comparison to the third category of the nations where it is working unsatisfactorily. [8]

Nations formulate and implement the election policies with the help of impartial institutions like the election commissions in every nation. Again the performance and scope of these commissions is not beyond the shadow of doubt in each and every democratic nation. Sometimes the false accusations are made against the performance of these institutions in order to challenge the mandate of the winning parties and sometimes this accusation is infact the indicator of the greatest flaw in the governmental and political set up of that country. Sometimes this election process ends up with the result of violence and stress in the nation along with new politically democratic state. The life expectancy of newly elected government does not depend upon the mandate achieved by the winning party only but also upon the free, fair and transparent elections. More the violence and stress is faced by the nation during the

elections more it creates a weak, unresponsive and unstable government due to the fact that the winning party has been oppressing or remained oppressed during the election process which clouded the fairness and impartiality of the election results. In the result no one can guarantee a healthy stable democratic government ahead. [9]

There can be no Democracy unless all are equal in the eyes of law. Look at the countries still struggling for a perfect democratic system but unable to cure it. They must have not applied the same laws for all of their residents. A president, prime minister, governors, other ministers and bureaucrats must be accountable for their acts in the same manner as a common person is accountable before the law. Often described as democratic Greek polity had recognized and implemented different laws for different classes of citizens. Different set of laws were made for the freemen and slaves which was against the very spirit of the supremacy of one law for all. Likewise Roman law was based on a gradation of obligation and rights dependent upon the differing status of the member of the society. The lower rank of a specific class had no claim over the rights and privileges of the people belonging to the higher class. Democracy takes as fact not only the unity of law but also equality of all before the law. This is in fact a result drawn from the first principle moreover it leads to the denial of birth and caste and is thus the first breach in the fortress of social status and rank. Primitive society is ruled by customs whereas customs grow through the repetition of similar situations which definitely preserves the sanctity of the status at first. As the emphasis is on repetition custom tends to become a “Rule of Thumb” which ignores the rationale of the rule. In consequence different rules are formed without discovering the principles underlying those rules. That is the reason that custom is always diverse and leads to the creation of a diversity of rules for different people on different occasions. If the same respect is given to the custom without any justified reason no rule of law can be formed. The theory of Divine rights of kings was a lucid challenge to the all claims of equality before the law. Finally it was repudiated in Europe in seventeenth century. [10]

The political parties with bad management or without any clear plan or agenda also become a reason for the failure of a political democracy. The political parties are the representatives of the people. The more a political party is popular among the masses the more it gains representation in the legislature of the state. These political parties must be more active and aware of the democratic values then they tend to pose for it. Mere fame of a political party on the basis of race, sect or a specific class of a society should never be considered as a criterion for testing its affiliation with democratic norms and will to fight for the rights of the people. The political parties must illustrate even stronger tendency towards democracy than that which is manifested by the state and other institutions of the state. [11]

Unfortunately in the third world countries aristocracy leads the political parties. Same noble and elite families rule over these parties again and again in the form for hereditary rule or sometimes they appoint figurehead commanders of their political parties by keeping the strings in their own hands.

The author in [12] observes on the role of political parties in a democratic system:

“I shall look at the role of parties from two major perspectives. First, the system of political parties constitutes an important linkage between the social, economic, and constitutional setting on the

one hand and political performance patterns on the other. Second, political party systems have autonomous influence of their own. The configurations of memory, organization, and perception that they represent have independent effects once they are established”.

There is need to formulate strong political party system in order to brighten the chances of strong democracies. The countries where equal chances are given to every man of the society to form or to join a political party with his free will, power keeps on shuffling to every talented, educated and politically mature person. This, of course helps to get benefit out of the capabilities of fresh minds in state affairs.

Another constant flaw in the deficient democratic systems is that the democratic governments do not know how to use their power. Even majority of the common people are not aware of the powers of democracy. Use of democratic power must be in accordance with peace, freedom, organization, skill and planning.

Democrats cannot hope to bring down a dictatorship and establish political freedom without the ability to apply their own power effectively. But how is this possible? What kind of power can the democratic opposition mobilize that will be sufficient to destroy the dictatorship and its vast military and police networks? It is only possible when some basic truths are understood. [13]

A Fourteenth Century Chinese parable by Liu-Ji, for example, outlines this neglected understanding of political power quite well:

“In the feudal state of Chu an old man survived by keeping monkeys in his service. The people of Chu called him “ju gong” (monkey master). Each morning, the old man would assemble the monkeys in his courtyard, and order the eldest one to lead the others to the mountains to gather fruits from bushes and trees. It was the rule that each monkey had to give one-tenth of his collection to the old man. Those who failed to do so would be ruthlessly flogged. All the monkeys suffered bitterly, but dared not complain.

One day, a small monkey asked the other monkeys: “Did the old man plant all the fruit trees and bushes?” The others said: “No, they grew naturally.” The small monkey further asked: “Can’t we take the fruits without the old man’s permission?” The others replied: “Yes, we all can.” The small monkey continued: “Then, why should we depend on the old man; why must we all serve him?” Before the small monkey was able to finish his statement, all the monkeys suddenly became enlightened and awakened.

On the same night, watching that the old man had fallen asleep, the monkeys tore down all the barricades of the stockade in which they were confined, and destroyed the stockade entirely. They also took the fruits the old man had in storage, brought all with them to the woods, and never returned. The old man finally died of starvation.” [14]

The author in [15] further illustrates that:

“When one wants to bring down a dictatorship most effectively and with the least cost then one has four immediate tasks: 1).One must strengthen the oppressed population themselves in their determination, self-confidence, and resistance skills,2). One must strengthen the independent social groups and institutions of the oppressed people,3). One must create a powerful internal resistance force; and 4).One must develop a wise grand strategic plan for liberation and implement it skillfully”.

The power of democracy can bring miracles provided if it is used positively and with due care. The power of the democracy is not meant the power for the politicians and their own families in respect of their wealth and prosperity and hold.

Another contributory to the failure of democracy in many countries is the centralized government system when power seems increasingly remote from majority or common people's life. Due to this fact most of the elected politicians do not have any real interest in the lives of common people usually. This phenomenon is against the core principle of democracy's majority rule. Again most of the times only the ones from the privileged and well settled class of the society like former bureaucrats, lawyers, industrialists, property owners, military officials and families already in politics tend to be the representatives of the people who have not a common life style privately and usually remain unable to understand the miseries of common men till their whole life. Many Western analysts, such as Samuel P. Huntington, are realizing that democracy is going through what they call "governability crisis." [16]

Norman Cousins had said: “In a democracy, the individual enjoys not only the ultimate power but carries the ultimate responsibility.” Moral and Social behavior of the common people along with the elected politicians also needs to be tailored in order to make a stronger democracy. Some of the philosophical principles are also connected with the concept of democracy when it is called a “Rule of Majority”. Democracy stands only when men are principled enough to make it stand. Again, the questions come to individual responsibilities, morality and strength of character that can contribute to safeguard the democracy. "The majority is right principle" is the core of democratic process. If there is no permanent and clear norm on a specific issue while dealing with sensitive moral and social issues. One more vote is enough to make anything legal no matter how disgusting, shameful and harmful the new thing might turn to be. With no permanent norms and in the absence of human development programs, schools under prevailing democracies have become indoctrination centers for a corrupt ideology, imperceptive materialism, Darwinian secularism and sexual life in a way which is still considered uncivilized in most societies. Human beings need justice and human societies and governance mechanism can never survive without justice and balance in all aspects of their operation. [17]

Those democracies can never prosper who does not pay due regard to press and media. Only an independent and confident media can educate the masses about the importance of democracy but it can also be a strong checking device over the political and bureaucratic heads. The countries where journalist can not point out the mistakes of the government or can not make an objection can never achieve ends of true democratic system. Media must be free and independent. Media has prime responsibility to share the public interest matters with the public as well as keeping

an eye over the government.

Democracy can never flourish where there is no supremacy of the constitution. The constitution amendment process must be made tough so that will of a particular person or his interest could not change the fate of the whole society in general.

Another constant danger to democracy is the rule of martial law or the military rule. It is essential to define, control and minimize the role of military in the politics of a country. In democracies, defense issues and threats to national security must be decided by the people, acting through their elected representatives. A democracy's military serves its nation rather than leads it: Military leaders advise elected leaders and carry out their decisions. Only those who are elected by the people have the ultimate authority and the responsibility to decide the fate of a nation. This principle of civilian control and authority over the military is fundamental to democracy.

In Pakistan, Sierra Leone and Congo-Brazzaville, democracy has weakened institutions and services, and manipulated elections simply restored and legitimized dictatorships. In Bosnia, democracy legitimized the worst war crimes in Europe since the Nazi era. Let us discuss the example of Afghanistan. If the Taliban were dictators or the authoritarians, why could the US not institutionalize pluralism with its experience and expertise to restore at least as much peace, law and order as was there during the Taliban era? Why do most Afghans now believe that the Taliban reign was far better than any kind of government or democracy they have experienced in *many* years? These few examples clearly express that only a strong democracy can guarantee the stability and progress of a country. To console each and every member of the society according to his needs and wants must be a goal of truly democratic form of government. If democracy is imposed upon a country without considering the requirements of human nature and without giving due care to the social, economic, religious and political setup of under consideration communities it can only bring disaster. It is not possible to establish a strong democracy without incorporating the human development factor for consolidating each individual in order to accommodate him. It is mandatory to win the hearts of the majority if not each and every human in order to establish a strong democracy. [18]

There are some of the countries which are somehow surviving in the world even if they are not democratic ones. These examples are very few in number and sooner or later they will also opt democracy as the only way out. Their example indicates that democracy is not the only criterion for development, peace and progress if it is not adopted with full devotion and effort. For example, Cuba is not a democratic country and also burdened with economic problems. It has a wartime political culture for more than forty years, however, it had achieved first world health and education standards in a Third World country, its infant mortality and literacy rates now rivaling or outstripping those of the US, its class sizes a third smaller than in Britain. When we compare it with next-door, "democracy" of Haiti, where half the population is unable to read and infant mortality is over 10 times higher. Haiti is deprived of basic human rights recognized by the international bodies like UN Declaration of Human Rights and the European Convention. [19]

4. Concluding Remarks

Of course, the ideals of democracy still hold, they look perfect, and practical too, as far as their implementation is concerned unfortunately a much more needs to be done in this regard. Without a serious evaluation of the deficiencies and weaknesses of democracy and presenting their cure, it is out to democratize the whole world in a short period of time. It is not to deduce that dictatorship is good and preferable and democracy is bad on the other hand. It is that much more reforms are required to be implemented in order to get rid of the weaknesses of the democracy.

As in today's world unemployment, corruption and exploitation are high. Every passing day is raising more questions about democracy's sustainability. There is a strong concern and panic that the wave of democratization will remain weak until improvement of human life in social and political spheres. There is need to aware the common people as well as the democratic leaders that it is compulsory to develop a culture of democracy rather using the democratic system as means to fulfill the interests of the few holding power. We must use all of our powers and capabilities with honesty and transparency if we want to reap the fruits of democracy.

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[14] This story, originally titled “Rule by Tricks” is from *Yu-li-zi* by Liu Ji (1311-1375) and has been translated by Sidney Tai, all rights reserved. Yu-li-zi is also the pseudonym of Liu Ji. The translation was originally published in *Nonviolent Sanctions*:

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