

ROLE OF ELECTRONIC MEDIA IN THE REVIVAL OF DEMOCRACY IN PAKISTAN IN THE FIRST DECADE OF THE 21ST CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

Electronic media has revolutionized the nook and corner of the world, either political challenges, economic issues or social impediments; electronic media become a yard stick to make accountable to the political institution which enhance democratic dispensation in the country; it is torch bearer for the deprived and common people. Not only this; electronic media has provided awareness to common peoples regarding their fundamental political, economic and social rights. Since third world countries are engulfed with political crisis due to lack of education and leadership that makes democratic process weak. Pakistan since its inception has been facing such problems. In the globalized world electronic media has provided opportunity to the suppressed classes and enhance inept political systems to reform and strengthen democratic process. The focus of this research is to highlight the role of electronic media for the enhancement of democracy in Pakistan. Electronic media has highlighted the issues of corruption of the political parties in Pakistan it has helped the judicial activism in the country against the dictatorial regime of General Pervaiz Musharraf

Key words: Electronic Media, Democracy, Pakistan's Political Scenario

INTRODUCTION

Renowned social scientist S. Akbar Zaidi (2008) wrote back in 2008 that a number of well-known columnists, analysts and anchorpersons, especially those that were known for their activism in the later years of the 1960s decade, were referring to the current period as revolutionary. Moreover, they also made frequent references to the era of 1968-70s and the period of 1986-88. The word revolution became so pervasive that the news channels reverberated this word almost the whole day and the newspapers were replete with the same. Keeping assumptions aside, the period wielded enormous significance especially in political terms. In the subsequent years, Zaidi's assertion based upon veteran journalists' keen observation proved to be right. He further said that, of the many actors responsible for this revolution, one is electronic media. During the same time, Pakistan was passing through political and social upheavals, which were set to change the political landscape of the country. Previously, we did not see media playing any pronounced role in the affairs of the state; one reason may be its nascent creation. However, the judicial wrangling with power corridors provided it with an opportunity to come forward and do something for the salvage of democracy.

Because the role of the Pakistan Supreme Court has mostly been that of legitimizing the political authority of the extra constitutional forces, its public image has not been rosy. However, with the judiciary taking up the cause of the public litigation, the media and public skepticism of judiciary began to decrease.

The electronic and print media policy started to change towards judiciary, and particularly towards chief justice Iftikhar Chaudhry (Ghias, 2010). As the Supreme Court under Iftikhar Chaudhry delivered on the cases of public interest, the media welcomed it as the people's court and exhorted it to address urgent constitutional and political issues.

The entire show got a flip from the news channels coverage. The turning of the situation into revolutionary and political change including its consequences is all attributed to the media. The news channels provided constant 24 hours coverage to the entire episode, and at times faced lethal attacks of the similar kind as happened on the citizens and T.V houses on 12 May. Moreover, the biggest boost in the favor of democracy were the slogans like go Musharraf go or no more military rule which were given coverage and heard on the live television channels. This was something that the state and polity of Pakistan had been never witness to. Not only this, the political party MQM was for the first time called a fascist party by numerous analysts on live streaming talk show programs. It would have been just a dream to show this much courage and call MQM a fascist party just a year before this movement (Zaidi, 2008).

One thing that was aptly established was the power that the media possessed. Both the ruling government and the opposition had recognized it. The news channels televised live each word each word uttered by the guides of the lawyer's movement. Even very sensitive and serious slogans like down with the generals, down with military were broadcasted and the news channels got away with it, though not entirely. They had to bear the burnt for it in the subsequent time. The media-legal community partnership proved to be very effective for the rescue of democracy in Pakistan.

In the face of growing mass media support for the lawyers' movement, General Musharraf was ill-advised to launch a crackdown upon major media groups, like Geo T.V and Aaj News. Huma Yousaf (2015) argues that this act of the president had more significant implications for electronic media than for the political situation. The way in which media outlets were handled during the emergency, which was suspended on December 5, 2007, exposed the susceptibility of electronic media, and provided it with opportunity to resuscitate all the more strong. Musharraf's impounding the news channels at the time of emergency showed how boom could go bust (Ibid). During the time of emergency, a media gap was emerged giving rise to new media groups and news channels as most reliable alternatives for information dissemination and people organizing. News channels in Pakistan emerged very strongly from this crisis.

Meanwhile, electronic media extended a very warm reception to civilian leaders returning from exile: Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif. One can see through video clips available on Youtube, a social networking site, that how greatly the electronic media had covered the episode of their return, followed by their appearance on talk shows and news channels. Their return episode was not only telecasted live inside Pakistan but the international media also aired its live coverage. And, Benazir Bhutto was showed live saying, "My return heralds for the people of Pakistan the return of the wheel from dictatorship to democracy (Guardian, 2007)." Following Benazir Bhutto, another vital political Player, former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, also returned from exile amid a huge coverage of cameras.

In Pakistan, the proliferation of news channels in 2002 has played an unprecedented role in creating socio-political consciousness among people. The role it played in the elections of 2008 laid milestones in the history of the country. In democratic societies, elections are vied as a significant means of experiencing change in a country. The Feb 2008 general elections are seen a unique practice in the country's history. It was held in a very tense atmosphere given the untimely assassination of Benazir Bhutto on 27 December 2007 (Khan, 2010). The polls were put off until February 18, 2008. However, they were held in a peaceful atmosphere under an intensive monitoring of media and civil society.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose and objective of this research can be materialized by adopting qualitative method

Data Collection Method

- Current research is being conducted through qualitative method and primary data collection method has been employed.
- Interviews have been conducted from 6 persons related to print and mass media.

- However, the data has been gathered and analyzed using secondary sources such as books, journals and articles, both in published and electronic forms.
- The data has also been collected by visiting the different well-established library of Pakistan including Central Library of Sindh University, National Library Islamabad, LUMS Library Lahore, Jinnah Public Library Sahiwal, E-Library Sahiwal, E-Library Lahore, Defense Public Library, Lahore.

List of Electronic media in Pakistan

- Electronic Media Fraternity Here Is the List of News Channel.
- 1. Geo News Channel
- 2. ARY News Channel
- 3. Sama News Channel
- 4. Duniya News Channel
- 5. Dawn News Channel

The focus of this research is to analyze the effect of main electronic media channels which left inedible implications on the politics of Pakistan

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is conducted under the lenses of Media Democracy Theory, which has been developed by Thomas Meyer and Hinchman in their book *Media Democracy: How Media Colonise politics*, published in 2002. The framework of media playing the role in establishing the democracy and political socialization entirely relies on the people's buying and understanding of the content's characteristics. A special focus is paid to the variables of the elements of democracy like political consciousness, political participation, public opinion making and political campaigning all promoted through electronic media.

This study is conducted under the lenses of Media Democracy Theory, which states and encourages for reforms of mass media to consolidate public service broadcasting and increase citizen participation to develop a system that promotes democratic values and empowers individual citizen. It seeks to achieve this cause through vast dissemination of information. Media Democracy involves that media should be availed for upgrading democracy; it also emphasizes that media should itself be democratic in its making. It encourages people's participation in public sphere, making access of the public to information rapid and easy. The public sphere is explained as the web of information and viewpoints of people. The Media Democracy theory supports:

- 1) It supports the ideal of democracy
- 2) It serves the public to raise democratic sensibility
- 3) Increase the role of citizen journalism

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Lawyers Movement and the News Channels: A Nexus To Bring Democracy Back

General Pervez Musharraf took over the reins of power after a Coup against then Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif. Soon after the success of the putsch, Musharraf drained several judges from judiciary in the fear of them turning against him and oppose his unconstitutional way of coming into power (Jaffrelot, 2015). In order to strengthen his foothold and make the purges in judiciary complete, Musharraf introduced Provisional Constitutional Order, which made it binding on the judges to jettison all the oaths under the constitution of 1973 and swear fealty to General Musharraf under the new order. Moreover, he promulgated the oath of office order 2000 to vent the judges of the superior courts. The newly constituted court was molded to his wishes, and its verdict in the suit of Zafar Ali Shah justified the takeover of General Musharraf. Ironically, then chief justice of Pakistan, Irshad.Hassan Khan, publically distributed the pages of his notorious judgment at various International Judicial meetings to show his expertise in jurisprudence (Abbas and Jasam, 2009).

Since the day of October 22, 1999, Musharraf's coup day, judiciary has witnessed innumerable casualties (Isa, 2007). On March 9, Iftikhar Chaudhry, the chief justice of Pakistan, was charged with a trumped up accusation of misconduct and misuse of authority by the president. In this regard, a reference was filed with the supreme judicial council to decide the case. In the absence of Justice Rana Bhagwan Das, justice Javed Iqbal was administered the oath as the acting chief justice. Article 209 of the constitution was evoked to justify these actions. This naturally evoked denunciation from all the quarters of the society and opposition on various grounds. Furthermore, the masses has its own views of what seems to become an exemplary event, having striking similarities with the case of Maulvi Tameezuddin, where from the rot in the Pakistani democracy (Faqr, Islam and Rizvi, 2013).

The chief justice has with him the might of using Suomoto powers in cases where he thinks any wrong doing or injustice has been done. In line with it, he has opened up numerous cases which involve human rights violation, in addition to suits relating to political and public significance, providing a sigh of relief to many disadvantaged groups and peoples. The chief justice also lamented that he had to incur the displeasure of the Prime minister and the President for investigating over 6000 cases of human rights violation (Ibid). Moreover, his inquiry into the illegal land allotment in Gawadar also turned against him.

Iftikhar Chaudhry was first elevated to the chair of the Chief Justice of Pakistan after he took oath to office under Provincial Constitutional Order 2000, brought by Pervaiz Musharraf, in 2005 (Notes, 2010). This tarnished his image in the lawyer community and he began to be seen as a stooge of the military establishment. And nobody expected from him to deliver on issues that directly linked with the general masses and democracy. However, just a day prior to his suspension, the chief justice heard the most sensitive of cases in the history of Pakistan- the cases of enforced disappearances. It transpired that at the end of 2005, the chief justice began to take up the cases of enforced disappearances, numbering at 400-600 people (Khan, 2012). As the cases of enforced disappearances have always been sensitive to the people in uniform, the Chief Justice's taking up such cases were a source of the army displeasure and it also irked the President.

What is pleasing for the people at large is that the Supreme Court has, of late, been curiously looking into cases of public litigation. It became able to do so through judicial activism under the suomoto powers. The landmark decision in the case of Pakistan steel mills has restored the prestige of the Supreme Court, which previously remained under dark clouds. Moreover, the Supreme Court gave equal importance to the cases in which excesses were done to the general public at the hands of powerful state institutions i.e police. The downtrodden segments of the society began to look at the Supreme Court with lungful eyes of justice and relief, and they were made sure off that. Only a strong, independent and impactful judiciary can guarantee the protection of the rights of the poor and underprivileged sections of society. Fragile and spineless, a judiciary only exposes the general masses to the arbitrariness of powerful institutions (Khan, 2006).

It happened on March 9, 2007, that the President General Musharraf summoned Iftikhar Chaudhry to his office and made him redundant on charges of "misuse of office". Chief justice became obdurate and refused to resign which sparked off anti-Musharraf agitation across the country for several months. Afterwards, when the Chief Justice was reinstated, the Supreme Court struck to its previous position on enforced disappearances, and in fact became a little more rigid. However, the chief justice sought to tactfully avoid any straight embroilment with Musharraf. So, on September 28, 2007, the Supreme Court called into question the dual role of Musharraf as the Army Chief and the President, which, technically, according to the constitution, one could not hold (Human Rights Watch Report, 2007).

As the Pakistani military has since the very beginning been in the driving seat of the country, especially politics, they have conventionally expected yes men and obedience from the legislature and judiciary. When the Chief Justice refused to resign, it marked an unprecedented break from such norms and asserted the civilian will. Just in a matter of days Chaudhry became a hero. In the words of a Pakistani historian and one of the leaders of the movement, Hamid Khan, he emerged as a sign of the general public's voice against the power corridors. (Notes: The Pakistani Lawyers Movement, 2010).

The President filed a reference against the Chief Justice stating the grounds that he has misused his office by going out of the way and supporting his son initially to build career in the medical profession, and

later in the police services. Furthermore, he was accused of possessing more cars than required and asking for protocol which was not given to any chief justice in the past. This involved police escort and the demand of being greeted by senior bureaucrats at the airport. Besides, he was also charged with the demand of aircrafts from the governor and chief minister for personal use (Rahman, 2007).

The first of the charges leveled against the Supreme Court chief justice was from a T.V personality and advocate Supreme Court Naeem Bukhari. He, in a letter of his on February 16, 2007, charged the chief justice with giving decision in court and subsequently announcing a totally opposite verdict in written, deriding and threatening lawyers, demanding showy protocol, availing costly vehicles and airplanes and exerting his influence with the decision-makers to help build his son his career in bureaucracy, overstepping due merit. With the publication of this letter in the press and the electronic media, it must have seriously injured his reputation (Nasim, 2007).

The public got outraged at the leaking of these charges of little importance against the chief justice. Even though verified or plausible, the nature of the accusations reduces to insignificance before a number of more serious charges that can be hurled at any number of the regimes most vocal supporters. This gave rise to the famous Lawyers' Movement, which got kicked off in two phases. In the beginning, the Supreme Court was confident of its autonomy because a section of lawyers were already in the streets. A very brief time later, a very expansive coalition was in the making which involved civil society members, lawyers, students, and political parties. All joined hands to protest against the arbitrary style of governance and decision making by Musharraf. This in a long run brought about various changes in the judicial and political systems of Pakistan (Bajwa, 2016).

The primary aims and objectives of the lawyers' movement were to establish rule of law, primacy of the constitution, and the supremacy of civilians over military. In this prism, reinstatement of the chief justice of Pakistan, besides 60 other judges 30 discharged by Pervez Musharraf unconstitutionally on November 3, 2007, became a subsidiary objective (Phelps, 2009).

Members belonging to the legal profession huddled to form a front of the popular movement to decisively manage the restoration of the chief justice. They also had to bear trouble when the state institutions retaliated to foil the march. A number of lawyers were incarcerated on the charges of disturbing the public order. Many were seriously wounded and got injured while in the struggle. As the entire world media was shooting the coverage, a huge number of appalling photographs appeared on TV screens. However, the even more horrifying violence took place in Karachi, which lasted for several days. A building, named Tahir Plaza, having over 200 chambers of lawyers, was put on fire by unidentified persons. No investigation was ever made, though the Sindh high court bar openly blamed MQM for this act. An operation, named Operation Zero Tolerance, was initiated against the lawyers, under which they were tried for the cases of terrorism under Anti-Terrorism Act (International Bar Association, 2009).

However, the most intriguing side of the lawyer's movement was its success to bring student groups and various urban professionals into its ranks. The students traditionally have remained repressed by the state, and they also saw in this movement a chance of liberty. So they co-operated with the lawyers and organized themselves.

Political analysts concluded that the chief justice and the subsequent crackdown on judiciary had plunged the country into judicial crisis. Hundreds of lawyers are swarming the streets and roads, boycotting the courts as the sign of protest against the government action. Opposition politicians call it a judicial and political crisis at the same time (Syed, 2007)

In the end, the lawyers' movement successfully secured what it had set out for: the removal of a dictator; and, this marked a new chapter in the history of the country-people's power. The movement succeeded in bringing together people from different walks of life ranging from civil society and media to politics, and certainly, this deserves to be recorded in the golden pages of history (Ahmed, 2012). Undoubtedly, the role of mass media can't be ignored as an essential support pillar for the civil rights resistance in Pakistan (AHRC, 2008).

The TV channels played a more significant role than newspapers during the lawyers' movement due to an obvious reason of small readership, thanks to low literacy rate (Ahmed, 2012). For the years 2010-2011, 58 per cent literacy rate was recorded by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS, 2011). As a result,

the print media's currency has been in the decline. In 1997, the number of print publications was 4,444, which was reduced to a mere 945 in 2003 (IMS, 2009). The reason of this decline could be attributed to a better replacement by TV channels. However, there may be other factors too, like feasibility and preferences. Owing to an easy access to cable operators, it has become quite easy for the people to watch TV channels at a lot low price.

Pakistan was experiencing its third stint of dictatorship in the year 2002. Totally different from the earlier dictatorships, under the regime of General Musharraf Urdu and English news channels underwent evolution and development (Between radicalization and democratization, 2009). This was a break from the past media control by the governments of the day. Liberal media laws emancipated media. General Musharraf's hidden motive behind this liberalization was to use the same media for strengthening the security of the state and give a befitting response to the constantly belligerent Indian media, which is famous for propaganda. However, it did not seem to fulfil the wishes of the security establishment when media turned against its own liberator.

It is pertinent to underline the revolution brought about by the electronic media with the assistance of private TV channels, occurred during the Musharraf rule. This transformation has entailed several changes, especially social. At the time when the movement was in the full swing, 15 out of a nearly total of 49 TV channels were wholeheartedly committed to the round the clock transmission (IMS, 2009). Back in 2002, of all the private channels, Geo News was listed as the first private channel, whose association was with the Jang group of newspapers. This Urdu channel is one of the most famous and most viewed news channels in Pakistan. However, this news channel has faced gagging and grilling on several occasions owing to its alleged wrong and misplaced representation and criticism of the security establishment. On multiple occasions this private channel has faced bans and off airing.

Accordingly, in 2009, the overall television viewership had jumped to 86 million (GI-P, 2009). However, one could argue that the mushroom growth of the private news channels network does not solely attribute to electronic media. A majority of the owners of these TV channels have a history of association with well-established print media houses, like the Jang group, Dawn, Nawa-i-Waqt, etc.

The lawyers' movement also adopted certain tactics which also involved news channels. Among those tactics, one was to effectively use news channels to disseminate their message, which ultimately help the resistance in the long run. For instance, the decision of the chief justice to undertake a series of visits to his supporters in bars councils all over the country during the time of his trial from May to July 2007. The news channels provided a live coverage to his each visit along with his supporters starting from Peshawar, and followed by his visits to Lahore, Faisalabad, Hyderabad, and Sukkar (Ahmed, 2012). The coverage by the news channels proved very effective for the movement. A Daily Times editorial on April 10, 2008, rightly concluded that "without TV coverage the deposed chief justice of Pakistan would not have become a national hero."

The overall mass media, TV channels in particular, were on the same page to challenge the legality of Musharraf's actions. It was chiefly through news channels that lawyers movement secured popular support which they used to challenge his dictatorial actions. In any kind of civil movement, the media secured popular support is the key to its success (Karatnycky & Ackerman, 2005). In this particular case, the dictatorial regime embroiled itself with the both: media and Lawyers, especially when he placed several curbs on the freedom of news channels. This gave the news channels an opportunity to join hands and openly challenge the legitimacy of Musharraf's rule.

One of the best modes of spreading message was through talk shows. The famous talk shows of Geo, Aaj and Ary TV proved highly effective in this regard. It was ultimately through news channels that people became aware and cognizant of the issue of Chief justice. Zahid Shahab (2012) says that when he asked a significant amount of people, who were part of his research sample, that who was responsible for mobilizing the people, they said News Channels. It can be deduced from this lengthy discussion that news channels role was extremely important and crucial for the restoration of democracy in Pakistan.

CONCLUSION

It can be inferred from the above discussion that electronic media has now become fifth pillar of the state. Pakistan being a weak democratic state needs strong and viable electronic media which ensure democratic dispensation and highlight the issues like injustice, political instability and economic challenges. Since the country remained under the siege of military governments its democratic institutions become fragile. The role of electronic media against the dictatorship of General Pervaiz Musharraf has shown its political impacts. Furthermore the role of electronic media in lawyer's movement has not only strengthened democratic institutions but also stopped the ways of military coup in the country.

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