[Democratic monopolies](https://nation.com.pk/09-Jan-2019/democratic-monopolies" \t "_new)

Dr Farid A Malik January 09, 2019 the Nation

During his speech in 1966, President John F. Kennedy quoted a Chinese curse, ‘May you live in interesting times’. He talked about the challenges faced by the democracies of the world; little did he know that in the emancipated 21 century democracy would also be monopolised. The revolution that had started in the bazaars of Athens around 420 BC has finally run out of steam. As I write this article on the first day of the 19th year of this century. I am not sure what is in store to address the plight of the common man, whose vote is counted but his welfare ignored.

Yes these are interesting times, while rich are getting richer the divide between the haves and have-nots is widening worldwide. Democracy is under serious threat as monopoly of any kind is its anti-thesis. There are all kinds of conspiracies. State led elite capture is real and effective. Empires have been built through politics. Recently the three times elected Ex-Prime Minister (PM) who is now imprisoned volunteered to teach the inmates. His request was turned down by the jail officials as his teachings can prove to be disastrous for the taught.

The situation in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan is even more critical as public sector educational system has almost collapsed. Future change managers are not being produced. System has almost become non-functional. Future change managers are not being produced. Those who spend millions in private school, colleges and academies are more interested in the return on their investment. Nation and society building seems to be on no one’s agenda. Those we elect to represent us in the corridors of power do not watch public interests. Despite being disfigured several times somehow the constitution has survived and remains our only hope for the future.

After education, the health sector is also in disarray. I came into this world in a public hospital (Lady Wellington) and my father departed for his heavenly abode in the same manner (Mayo Hospital). Monopolisation starts from here. Pakistan has one of the highest percentage of cesarean births even in rural areas, the term ‘Wadda Operation’ (Big surgery) is used. People have to borrow money to pay for this procedure which in most cases is unnecessary. Similarly, tuition academies teach students the techniques of taking exams instead of imparting knowledge. Only the grades count while the standards continue to decline.

The three-times PM of Britain took his country to war in Iraq against the wishes of his people. Recently, Tony Blair has apologised to his nation for his gross error of judgment as the weapons of mass destruction were not found, instead the democracies of the world stole the ancient artifacts of Baghdad and pocketed the money from the sale of its oil. The same approach was adopted in Libya and Syria. The Syrians decided to fight back, finally the US troops have been withdrawn from there.

Student activism of the sixties brought the downfall of the first usurper of Pakistan. The canvassing at the grass roots brought the progressives into power in the seventies, that is why Zia the tyrant decided to do away with both. Student Unions remain banned till today. This lack of activism has produced political dynasties that dominate the political arena. The time tested comrades that survived the Zia dark ages are now either gone or neutralised. Politics of dole outs dominate most parties, the genuine or “Jiyala” culture has perished.

Most public sector universities need operation clean up, followed by a major revamp as they seriously lag behind in research and wealth generation activities. It is widely believed that Aligarh University created Pakistan. It produced the change managers who then not only played a pivotal role in its creation but also in running the first Islamic democracy of the world. Recently an article was published that highlighted the role of the legendary poet Asadullah Khan Ghalib who had convinced Sir Syed Ahmed Khan to form an educational institution for the uplift of the Muslims of India.

While the security Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) and Competition Control Commission of Pakistan (CCP) check monopolies and cartels in businesses there is no such regulatory body for democracy. May be it is time to form such an organisation to protect the rights of the voter instead of the voted who emerge through monopolistic controls and then exploit the masses for their personal interests.

In the absence of ideology, families have started to dominate politics. Usually all bases are covered, one brother is one party while the other is in another, the clan always retains its authority to monopolise the democratic order. A few years back a connection tree of families was published, even bureaucracy, judiciary and armed forces were covered to highlight their complete monopoly over power.

While we claim to live in the information age, disinformation remains equally powerful. Manipulated and engineered decisions are possible through media campaigns. Democracy is all about participation, noise, hustle bustle of the marketplace where it took roots. Dissent and accommodation are the basic ingredients of a democratic order which have been overrun by monopolies. Representative democracy is on the decline; unless major remedial measures are adopted this system of governance may come to an end throwing the world into an unmanageable chaos. One way to break the shackles is to empower the voter with the right to recall their elected representatives. It happened in Arizona in the eighties when Governor Evan Mecham was recalled through a petition signed by 75% of the registered voters. It was an historic event which can be expanded to other democracies of the world. After all going back to the turmoil that prevailed in 420 BC Athens would be a major step backwards for mankind, democracy should be protected while shattering the monopolies within, otherwise the civilized world order practised for thousands of years will come to an end, it may be prove to be a return into the dark ages of human history. The grass root activism has to be restarted without delay to preserve humanity for all times to come. Progressives of the world have to unite to protect the democratic order that was launched as a crusade to shatter monopolies of all kinds, which has now fallen prey to monopolistic control itself what a pitiful situation it is.

The Writer is Ex-Chairman, Pakistan

Science Foundation.

 fmaliks@hotmail.com