**Elections in Pakistan (Part 1)**

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A few days earlier, I heard former prime minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi say on media that all elections in Pakistan were bogus. Many are wondering what led him to give such a bold statement. Since the day he had become prime minister, he has always carried out himself in a simple, straight yet bold manner; showing no worry come what may even in his NAB cases. However, it would have been better for him had he elaborated on this statement.

I remember all elections in Pakistan since 1988. Though a child then, I still remember the time because my beloved father, Dr Jehangir Bader, was contesting the election from the walled city of Lahore. I had actively participated in the campaign and was part of the elections after that as well. I too had contested once from Lahore as a Provincial Assembly candidate.

If my memory does not fail me, the 1985 elections were based on a non-party system, which was announced by Martial Law Administrator, Zia ul Haq. I remember Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto saying how not participating in the election was a mistake even though it was nonparty-based. Still, she believed some mechanism could have been adapted to participate in that election. The 1985 election gave rise to many newcomers who were picked by the choice of the dictator. Many people from the elite class and feudal families became a part of the parliament and most of them are still enjoying the fruits of power. It does not matter which party comes into power or who enjoys the seat of power (democracy or dictatorship) they are all aligned to be a part of the ruling government. This election destroyed us as a nation because there was no rule of law and many families benefitted from the resources of the government. Mr Muhammad Khan Junejo, the prime minister of Pakistan during the dictatorship of Zia, was thrown out in May 1988. Zia announced the new election after the dismissal of the government.

The benefit had the inherent effect on many in the coming governments and for some, it continues.

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1988 elections were won by the Pakistan People’s Party but with a simple majority because the establishment tried their level best to stop Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto from becoming the first Muslim and Pakistani women Prime Minister of Pakistan. Yet, it still happened due to the public pressure and support by the people of Pakistan at that time. The PPP had a simple majority in Punjab as well and many independent candidates were ready to support and join it. And then occurred the unfortunate incident of Changa Manga that changed the entire culture of politics, rotting the political cadre and members of the provincial assembly by giving them undue favours including money. A gap persisted as the trust deficit between the decision-makers and the PPP leadership could not be covered by any change. The vote of no-confidence motion was moved against the PPP government and the same strategy of Changa Manga was tried but it didn’t work out that well. The motion was declined. In the second attempt, the government was dismissed by President Ghulam Ishaq Khan using the power of 58 (2) (b). These were the elections when I saw that workers of PPP and other parties never demanded any cash or favour from the candidates to open their offices at a local level. The workers and supporters were the ones who spent money on the candidates to support them. This was the election that gave many people from the lower and middle classes an opportunity to contest the election. Many became members of the parliament while a few got elected afterwards. The government was dismissed in August 1990 and fresh elections were announced after 90 days

As a result of the 1990 elections, Mr Nawaz Sharif emerged as the prime minister of Pakistan. This election was toughly contested between the PPP and the coalition of nine parties, Islami Jamoori Ittihad (IJI). My father contested from the same constituency and got even more votes than in the last election. However, elections were hijacked. That was the PTV era when just results were telecasted and there remained no checks and balances. This was the victory of decision-makers who threw the PPP government out of power and brought their new horse in. It wasn’t out of love for him but simply because of hatred against the PPP leadership.

I participated in the election campaign of my father but this time, it was a little different. All government forces and agencies were cracking down on our supporters to change the loyalties of those who were weak or had any business or relation with the government. They had no choice other than to support the unofficial candidate of the government. This was the last election where I saw the PPP workers supporting their candidates and opening their offices at the local level. Unofficial government candidates had given an irreparable loss to the workers and political culture of Pakistan. Following this, no person from the lower or middle class could not think of contesting the election without having some extra money on their hands. That was the end for those who were not rich from ever thinking about contesting the election. The whole system of elections was rotten by the incoming leadership, especially in the city of Lahore. This government could not complete its tenure as it had a misunderstanding with the decision-makers led by the then President Ghulam Ishaq Khan. The Supreme Court’s decision to reinstate the government gave some hope but the system was choked. The conflict between the President and Prime Minister resulted in the resignation of both of them by the intervention of the then COAS Abdul Waheed Kakar. The decision of the Supreme Court in the Asghar Khan case is self-explanatory, which has not been implemented so far.

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