**PPP’s Legacy**

**The PPP’s democratic vision aligns with the ideas of great political thinkers who have emphasized liberty, democracy, and state formation.**

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In the tumultuous political history of Pakistan, the Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) has emerged as a resilient force championing democratic governance. Since its inception in 1967, the PPP has been instrumental in advocating for democracy, navigating the treacherous waters of military dominance, and striving for a more inclusive and just society. This article argues that without the contributions of the PPP, Pakistan’s democratic trajectory would have been markedly different. The future of democracy in Pakistan, too, will be profoundly shaped by the PPP’s ongoing efforts.

The PPP’s journey began under the visionary leadership of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (ZAB), who founded the party with a commitment to Islamic socialism, social justice, and economic equity. Bhutto sb’s political acumen was pivotal in mobilizing the public against the regimes of Generals Ayyub Khan and Yahya Khan. Assuming leadership at one of Pakistan’s lowest points, following the secession of East Pakistan in 1971, ZAB sought to rebuild the nation on true democratic principles. His most enduring legacy will always be giving the nation a constitution in 1973, which wouldn’t have been possible without him; one that ultimately established Pakistan as a parliamentary democracy and enshrined fundamental rights. This constitution remains the bedrock of Pakistan’s legal and political system, emphasizing the separation of powers, federalism, and democratic governance.

Bhutto Sb’s tenure saw significant reforms aimed at redistributing wealth and empowering the working class. Nationalization of key industries and land reforms were central to his vision of economic equity. Though these policies sparked considerable controversy in some quarters, they were welcomed by the masses. Nevertheless, his efforts laid the foundation for a more inclusive political order. His leadership during the early 1970s was marked by a delicate balancing act, navigating the influence of the military while establishing civilian supremacy.

The PPP’s commitment to democracy was further exemplified by Shaheed Benazir Bhutto (BB), ZAB’s daughter. Her ascent to power in 1988 as the first female Prime Minister of Pakistan and the Islamic world was a historic moment. Her leadership was characterized by her unwavering dedication to democratic principles, despite facing immense challenges and threats. She championed judicial independence, freedom of the press, and political pluralism. BB’s tenure was marked by efforts to strengthen democratic institutions and promote human rights, even as she faced manufactured political instability.

Shaheed Benazir’s role in combating General Zia-ul-Haq’s military regime and leading the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD) was pivotal. Her leadership during this period galvanized public support for democracy and played a crucial role in ending the military rule. Shaheed Benazir’s resilience and political acumen enabled her to navigate the treacherous political landscape and eventually lead the country after Zia’s regime. Her government’s policies aimed at improving healthcare, education, and employment opportunities for women underscored her commitment to social justice and gender equality.

Another significant contribution was Shaheed Benazir’s role in ending General Pervez Musharraf’s martial law. She went toe-to-toe with not one, but two military dictators and brought home wins for democracy. Through skillful negotiation, she played a pivotal part in the political transition, ensuring that free and fair elections were held. Her discussions with Musharraf facilitated the conditions necessary for a democratic transition, reinforcing the PPP’s role as a champion of democracy in Pakistan.

Following Shaheed Benazir’s assassination in 2007, President Asif Ali Zardari assumed the leadership of the PPP and became the President of Pakistan. His tenure was crucial in maintaining political stability and ensuring the continuity of democratic governance at a time when Pakistan faced uncertainties on all fronts. He was instrumental in removing Musharaff from the presidency, completing the democratic transition. Another crucial contribution by President Zardari was his leadership in passing of the 18th Amendment to the Constitution in 2010, which devolved significant powers from the federal government to the provinces. This landmark amendment addressed longstanding regional grievances and reinforced parliamentary democracy by removing the President’s power to unilaterally dissolve the National Assembly.

President Zardari’s tenure focused on strengthening civilian institutions and ensuring judicial independence. His government enacted reforms to enhance the autonomy of the Election Commission and promote transparency in the electoral process. Despite facing economic challenges and political opposition, President Zardari’s efforts consolidated democratic norms and practices, underscoring the PPP’s commitment to democratic governance.

Bilawal Bhutto Zardari (BBZ), the current Chairman of the PPP, represents the new generation of leadership committed to democratic values. Under his leadership, the PPP has continued to advocate for social justice, human rights, and democratic governance. Bilawal’s emphasis on engaging with the youth and addressing contemporary issues reflects his vision for a progressive and inclusive Pakistan. He has been a vocal advocate for democratic reforms, including electoral transparency, judicial independence, and the protection of civil liberties. His efforts to modernize the PPP and address the aspirations of a young and dynamic population underscore his commitment to a forward-looking democratic agenda.

BBZ’s leadership and democratic credentials were on display when he formed the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) to arrest the rapid erosion of democracy under Imran Khan’s Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI) who was taking the country towards fascism and one-party rule. His dealings with General Qamar Javed Bajwa during the time leading up to the vote of no confidence were crucial in maintaining civilian supremacy and preventing military overreach. His ability to navigate these complex relationships while advocating for democratic principles demonstrates his political acumen and dedication to the democratic process.

The PPP’s contributions to democracy must be viewed against the backdrop of the military’s dominant role in Pakistan’s political history. Each PPP leader has navigated the complex relationship between civilian and military power, striving to uphold democratic principles while addressing security concerns. The party’s resilience in advocating for civilian supremacy has been a defining feature of its political journey. The PPP’s efforts to promote democracy have also involved challenging the legacy of extractive institutions inherited from British colonial rule. These institutions, designed to maintain control and authority, have often hindered democratic development. The PPP’s reforms, particularly in devolving power and promoting accountability, have aimed to transform these institutions to serve the people rather than control them.

The PPP’s democratic vision aligns with the ideas of great political thinkers who have emphasized liberty, democracy, and state formation. The party’s commitment to social justice and political empowerment resonates with the works of thinkers like John Locke, who advocated for government as a protector of natural rights, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who emphasized the importance of general will and participatory democracy.

The Pakistan People’s Party has played an indispensable role in the development and promotion of democracy in Pakistan. From Zulfikar Ali Bhutto’s foundational contributions to Benazir Bhutto’s courageous leadership, Asif Ali Zardari’s stabilization efforts, and Bilawal Bhutto Zardari’s progressive vision, the PPP has consistently championed democratic values and reforms. The journey of the PPP underscores the resilience and determination required to uphold democracy in a country with a complex political history. As Pakistan continues to navigate its democratic path, the PPP’s legacy and ongoing efforts provide a beacon of hope for a more inclusive, equitable, and democratic future. Under the leadership of Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, the PPP remains committed to realizing the democratic aspirations of the people of Pakistan, ensuring that the principles of liberty, justice, and democracy prevail. The future of democracy in Pakistan will undoubtedly be shaped by the PPP’s unwavering commitment to these ideals.

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