



Democratization in Pakistan: Role of Media in Civilian and Military Regimes

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Abstract

Without active, free and strong media, democracy is not completed. In countries where freedom of press is limited, democratic values are not established. Media had been facing violence in Pakistan whether it remained political or military governments. Struggle of press can be traced back before the inception of Pakistan when press was under tight governmental control. This caused nothing other than sabotaging the rights of people. Founder of Pakistan was strong supporter for the freedom of press and encouraged Muslims to get declarations for new newspapers. It is an important question to investigate why in the democratic republic of Pakistan such Colonial Laws are made that hindered the progress of press and media. And it is also important to investigate that how media raised the voice of suppressed people in the dictatorial regimes and what was the role of media in civilian governments for the promotion of democracy.

Key Words: Democratization, Press, Media, Media Laws, Colonial laws, Pressure Groups

Introduction

Respect for freedom of publishing, freedom of information and respect for right to information have been classified as the prerequisites for the progress of free press. Freedom of free press means presence of such an environment in which opinions on the public issues can be expressed freely and without fear of hostility from the organized government and informal society. (Rahman, 1990, p. 109). Press is an important forum to articulate the public opinions. In this study, the researchers have to find out how the media has been neutral and worked for objective communication for the general public. Without vigilant media, democracy cannot fill the aspirations of the people. If the train of democracy is to run smoothly then there must not be any hurdle in its freedom of depicting facts. The terms “Press” and “Media” are used interchangeable here to apply to organs of both print and broadcast journalism.

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Free media safeguards the public interests and gives a chance for balanced debate. Democracy empowers the people and strengthens by right to information whereas in authoritarian societies right to information is given to few powerful people. Free media, tolerance and freedom of expression are key properties of a liberal political system. Right to information makes a society inclusive and ensures transparency and accountability in the society. Freedom of expression is guaranteed in universal human rights and most of the countries give constitutional cover to this right (Ali & Khalid, 2012, p. 7). Generally governments are not pleased with the vigilance and criticism of media. Relations of government and media show the situation of democracy in the country. Culture for media activities seems to be significant as mass media in this part of the world have been under tight governmental control since Colonial (Iqbal, 2011a, p. 14).

Pakistan inherited administrative problems from its inception and that was the main reason early government relied upon bureaucracy and military to solve these issues. Quaid-e-Azam believed in the supremacy of law and constitutionalism. The future polity of Pakistan which was a new born state, Quaid-e-Azam had a clear vision about it. He knew well about the parliament based government which stood on four pillars, the legislature, the executive, the judiciary and press (Niazi, 2004, p. 250). Before the inception of Pakistan, the press was only a source that used to raise issues of public concerns. Although there was All India Radio but it was a mouth piece of government.

Relationship between press and government remained harsh, after the death of founder of the Nation Muhammad Ali Jinnah where other institutions were deteriorated by the politicians; press was also curtailed. Working journalists remained under the attack while covering the stories or during highlighting the corruption issues (report freedom-world 2012 Pakistan, 2012).

Pre-Partition Press

History reveals this fact that from the War of Independence till partition of Indian Subcontinent, frequent measures were applied by the government to control the press. The press was suppressed to the extent that it could not cultivate public opinion against Imperial masters from England. The Muslim press had no option to sacrifice its freedom for the greater cause of independence of Subcontinent from the tyrannical rule of British government (Iqbal, 2010). The atrocities imposed by the British rule continued. Defence of India Act, Central Publicity Board, The Press Act 1922, Press Emergency Powers Act 1931, Criminal Law Amendment Act 1932 were promulgated by the British Government to bring the press to its knees. After the Pakistan Resolution in 1940, there had been many newspapers that played a significant role to oust the alien rulers from the Indian Subcontinent. They did not agree to do any compromise with the British rulers and never bowed even under hard-pressed circumstances. Before the creation of Pakistan, the laws like The Press Act 1931, The Official Secrets Act, the Telegraph Act etc., were hurdle in the way of press freedom (Alam, p. 9).

Before partition in the decade of 1930, 32 weekly papers and 32 English papers were being published in Subcontinent. By 1947 the number of newspapers increased. At that time there were 51 dailies and 258 weeklies. The eminent scholars and political activists like Maulana Zafar Ali Khan, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, Maulana Mohammad Ali Johar, Maulana Hasrat Mohani and Abdul Kalam Azad were deeply engrossed in productions of

literature. It seemed as the very nascent version of Pakistani media or press was dominated by activists. That is the reason the present condition of Pakistani media can be traced back from the inception of Pakistan (Naqvi, 2015).

Lahore had been center of Press but most of the press was in the hands of non-Muslims whereas Muslim press had limited circulation and advertisement in those areas. Dawn and Manshoor were started on the encouragement of Mr. Jinnah to raise the voice of Muslim League in the region. The commencement of Pakistan Times and Nawai- i- Waqt in the several cities was appreciated by Mr. Jinnah (Muslim Journalism During 1939-1947, 2013). When in February 1947 Mian Iftikharuddin and some of his colleagues decided to launch The Pakistan Times, Mr. Jinnah gave them his blessings and allowed them to publish his name on the masthead of the newspaper (Niazi, 2009, p. 126).

Post-Partition Press

Pakistan was declared as democratic country so the laws that were made would certainly assure the freedom of press. But media laws of Pakistan got tendency of suppressing fundamental dissent in inheritance from colonial rule. This situation further exacerbated the nature of working of the Media during crisis because it was used as pretext to control media on the ground that it might not spread confusion among the fragmented people of Pakistan (Jabbar & Isa, 1997, pp. 67-69).

Muhammad Ali Jinnah was acknowledged by Stanley Wolpert as a nation builder who altered the course of history and at the same time established a nation-state by modifying the map of world (Wolpert, 1984, p. 5). He was great exponent of freedom of speech and guardian of freedom of press. Individuals' rights and freedom were very sacred for Muhammad Ali Jinnah. He remained on forefront in saving the right to speak. He advocated a number of cases where press was tried to be muzzled (Setalvad, 1965, p. 286). On one occasion he emphasised the importance of press and freedom of expression in following words.

“You have great power. You can guide or misguide people. You can make or mar the biggest personalities. The power of the press is really great, but you must remember that this power which you are wielding is a trust... At the same time I expect you to be completely fearless, if I go wrong or for that matter, the League goes wrong in any direction of its policy or programme, I want you to criticise it honestly as its friend, in fact, as one whose heart is beating with the Muslim nation” (Mohammad Ali Jinnah while addressing Muslim Journalists, 1947).

All above statements of Mr. Jinnah are in favour of freedom of speech. If someone tries to analyse the condition of press in the early days he could see that first phase of political activities after the creation of Pakistan remained from 1947 to 1958. Following laws of Colonial regime were used against the Press. The Central Press Special Powers Act 1947 was used to harass the journalists. Security of Pakistan Act 1952 was also used against the persons who were writing against the foreign relations of government. Safety Act of 1950 was used against the Adabe Lateef and compelled the newspaper to deposit security. Adabe Latif, Savera, and Naqoosh were banned for publishing the work of Manto who was a radical writer. The political situation in the country remained severe, after assassination of first Prime Minister of Pakistan (Balouch, 2016). In 1954 Ghulam Muhammad dissolved

the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan. To control the political turmoil and suppress people a new law was promulgated with the name of Public Order Ordinance of 1960. This law allows governmental agencies to check the premises of the newspaper and allow government to stop the import of the newspaper material of any newspaper and even impose a ban on the publication of the paper. Progressive writer were detained and later on PPL was occupied, this organization was working for the Progressive ideology (Press in Chains: History of media gagging in Pakistan, 2009).

To suppress the truth another method was introduced in the reign of Ayub Khan by the name of Press Advice. To suppress or to highlight any news one phone call was enough from press information Department (Niazi, 2004, p. 260). The occupation of the Progressive Papers Group was considered as an attempt to silent the voices of rationale and dissent. In June 1960, the takeover of the Associated Press of Pakistan was justified on the administrative and financial breakdown and later on the supply of news to the media was also controlled. Thus Associated Press of Pakistan (APP) became a source for official news. The news also suffered problems, technical services as well as financial restraints. (Jabbar & Isa, 1997, p. 81). 26 November 1964 was the day when Government owned Television broadcasted first time in Pakistan

General Ayub was also responsible for the introduction of direct pressure. It was with the intention to curb freedom of media. A telephonic call from the Press Information Department had so much influence that it could suppress any voice. Even the regime of President Pervaiz Musharraf employed this tool under the cover of request (Ali & Khalid, 2012, p. 7). Press and publication Ordinance of 1963 made it mandatory to publish the name of publisher and mention the place of publication on newspaper. (Excerpt: Freedom of expression, 2007). National Press Trust was also an effort in Ayub era to monitor the Press at that time. Freedom of expression was curbed and dissent voices were not allowed to utter. (Iqbal Z., 2011a, p. 14).

Awami Raj of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto started with the rhetoric to breath our society. Bhutto said that he wanted to end the suffocation, but his words proved to be empty (Niazi, 2004, p. 258). In the history of journalism post 1977 was the worst period in which Pakistani press was humiliated through different tactics. Although the journalists were harassed or threatened during the period from 1972 to 1977 but the important initiative was that a new constitution was made in 1973. It was the first time in the political history of Pakistan that the common person used his right of vote to elect public representatives. Off the record talks of the Speaker of the Assemblies were also stopped to publish. Other news that were stopped; material that could cause violence, false rumours, black mailing news, material against the sovereignty and material against the government and armed forces. Promulgation of this ordinance was the demand of the journalists Association like Pakistan Federation of Journalists. During Bhutto's government, Altaf Gauhar, editor of acclaimed newspaper Dawn was arrested and humiliated on the charges of obscene literature, and liquor. National Press Trust (NPT) was established to make the highest standard of journalism. Whereas some of the journalists had different views about this trust, according to them the trust was made to put newspapers under the control of the Business Elites (Jones D. , 2015, p. 1799). Associated Press of Pakistan (APP) was also taken by government to support its financial weakness. In United Pakistan PPL owned eleven newspapers in different languages like Urdu, English and Bengali. "Then came the anti-Bhutto Coup of July 1977, and these very same newspaper became anti Bhutto as happily

and effortlessly as they had become pro Bhutto on the morrow of PPP's accession to power"(Niazi Z. , 2009, p. 143).

Era of Zia ul Haq remained from 1978 to 1988 and was considered as the hardest time on the press freedom. In the initial phase of army coup, military governments announce liberty for the press. Zia also allowed constructive criticism to overcome his shortcomings in the early days. But with the passage of time, freedom to talk against the policies of the government was forbidden. A concept of pre-censorship was also given in Zia era. In the start of his tenure he gave a goodwill gesture by restoring declaration of some newspapers. He also allowed foreign journalists to dispatch their reports without censorship. Union of Journalists and All Pakistan News Papers Employees Confederation raised demand to repeal Press and Publication Ordinance. Amendments by Zia in the Articles 499 and 500 made defamatory material cognizable. When the Martial law was lifted, Muhammad Khan Junejo became Prime Minister of Pakistan and he withdrew the amendment in the defamation Articles.

The duty of the press is to find facts and if need criticize it after analysing it but authorities have forgotten it (Niazi, 2004, p. 165). Martial Law Regulations were introduced. These MLR were misused by authorities, punishment of lashes were given to Journalists under these regulations. In 1988 the government of Muhammad Khan Junejo was dissolved under the article of 58(2) b. The relations between Press and Junejo government remained cordial and smooth (Ali & Khalid, 2012, pp. 43-48). *Musawaata*, a well-known newspaper, was also under the attack of this era and publication of this newspaper was stopped (Iqbal, 2011b, p. 80). MLR 48 had serious concerns about the freedom of press as it restricted the publication of political news. After the death of Zia ul Haq the environment became conducive for a change in the Press and Publication Ordinance.

But when Zia came in power, both *Nawa-e-Waqt* and *Jang* supported the military take-over and expressed the confidence that the military would hold free and fair elections within ninety days, as the Chief Martial Law Administrator General Muhammad Zia ul Haq had promised in his first address to the nation on radio and television"(Akhtar, 2000, p. 153). The amendments in the ordinance of 1963 were considered as a gift of Zia regime for the freedom of press but in actual it was another way of censorship even for the books (Niazi, 2004, p. 260).

In September 1988, this law was replaced with the new law named as Registration of Printing Press and Publications Ordinance. In the past a black list was made comprising the names of journalists and poets who were against the Martial Law regime. These journalists were not called for programmes in radio and television that had name in the list. This list was also abolished. A sense of distrust was developed between the journalists and government. The law with the name of Press and Publication Ordinance was introduced in the government of Nawaz Shareef that compelled newspapers and press to register with the government. Another controlling body was introduced with the name of Press and Publication Regulatory Authority' (PAPRA) (Siraj, 2009, p. 45).

Media During Democratic Intervals

In her first term during 1988 to 1999, Benazir was more liberal in her media policies, she gave coverage time of TV to opposition and that was a new thing in media's history. She

also declared to abolish the press laws which are against the freedom of press. In the second tenure of Pakistan Peoples Party emphasis was given on human rights, freedom of expression, and freedom of speech. Minister for information Mr. Javaid Jabbar also pledged to introduce new changes in media policies (Niazi, 1992, p. 84). Though during the era of Peoples Party no direct measures were taken against the press, but the workers of some other political parties remained in constant tussle with the press. Suggestions were given to increase the import duties on the press. Some of the owners of newspapers were in favour of newsprint quota system. Newsprint quota was used to show influence of the government. Beside this government had also been using advertisement to newspapers as source of control. News printing quota system was abolished during her tenure. Harassment of journalists was seen in the second tenure of PPP from the various pressure groups. Duties on import of press machinery were increased. Bribes and undue pressure were used as techniques to corrupt the fourth pillar of the state. Institution of journalism was weakened by the unprofessional and irresponsible behaviour of some journalist and the nation faced the consequences of these practices in the later years (Iqbal, 2011, p. 110).

In her second tenure hostilities upon the journalists continued. Salahuddin a well-known journalist was killed. He was threatened many a times but he remained undaunted on his stance of unveiling the malpractices of different groups. On paper and in theory the NPT was an independent institution but it always acted on the behalf of Islamabad based government. It served the rulers with great enthusiasm till 1996 when its final closure happened by Benazir Bhutto. NPT papers, for over three decades carried out campaigns of character assassination and slander against all those parties and individuals (Niazi, p. 256).

If we analyse the condition of media in subsequent government of Nawaz Shareef a reference of Dawn March 16 is given by Zamier Niazi is very important. He says that on 15th of March 1990 Journalists were protesting against the murder attempt on Jang staff reporter when they passed in front of the Muslim League house, fire was opened at the journalists. It was blamed that these were boys of Muslim Students Federation (Niazi, 1992, p. 129). Democracy of Pakistan again trampled with a shock from the President House when Ghulam Ishaque Khan dissolved the National Assembly of Pakistan on August 6, 1990. This Assembly came into existence almost two years ago in the result of party based elections. Dissolution of assembly was a setback for democracy (Niazi, 1992, p. 148).

On December 23, 1990, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif criticised role of journalists while addressing to CPNE. This was the first meeting on a lunch hosted by the CPNE. He said that “a lot of journalists in the country were on the payrolls of politicians or political parties” stories that some journalist, who act as touts of either government agencies or political parties have been heard from time to time, but this was the first occasion when someone in high authority had spoken of possessing proof to make the grave charge stick (Niazi, 1992, p. 159).

In his second tenure Nawaz Shareef came with two third majorities in the assembly. Powers of the President to dissolve assembly was taken back. Heavy mandate in elections gave him so much power that Nawaz Sharif refused to take pressure of the US government in May 1998 when he decided to conduct the nuclear tests. Media was still facing harassment, threats, controversial laws and pressure to change its direction according to some segments. In Pakistani political system media was often threatened by the political workers. Political parties do, not give training political workers to show tolerance in their

behaviour. These workers lack courage to accept any kind of criticism against them. In the last days of government of Nawaz Shareef tussle between Jang Media Group and Nawaz Shareef Government was at its peak. Government were blaming that the newspaper was defaulter of tax while newspaper was publishing the corruption stories of government. Najam Sethi, a renowned journalist, was arrested on the charges of treason in 1999. It was a high profile case, the journalist remained in custody, later on he was released and charges were dropped against him. Political parties often remained annoyed with the newspapers who published news against them. On many of the occasions copies of newspapers were burnt by the several groups and organizations that were not happy with the news coverage of the newspapers. Editor of the newspaper like Takbeer were threatened several times.

Media in Contemporary Pakistan

Still journalism is considered as a dangerous profession. The pen holders are always at the risk of coming under the rain of bullets. The dawn of terrorism has severe threats on press. Free press is the need of the country but instead of that print media is used to propagate disinformation (Niazi, *Fettered Freedom*, 2004, p. 263). Support of free press was found only in theory, practically in some parts of the world people do not have awareness about the importance of free press (Janda, Berry, & Goldman, 2009, pp. 188-189). Major organization of newspapers owners in Pakistan is All Pakistan Newspapers Society (APNS). Jang Group, Nawa-i-Waqt and Dawn are the important members. Working journalists are not satisfied with the facilities provided to the journalists. It is the demand of the Federal Unions of Journalists for the Wage Board Award that is still pending for a long time.

The press has always to face hostile attitude from the government and the political parties. In the same way the role of journalists cannot be considered praise worthy. The journalists exposed themselves undexterous immature and unprofessional in dealing with the crucial issues of national interest. The role of some of media persons have been exposed as puppet because they are performing for the interests of political parties and the government. Every successive government laboured to win the hearts of some significant editors and so called working journalists by rendering them gifts. Some lucrative posts have been offered to these journalists (Ali & Khalid, 2012, p. 7). Powerful financial institutions and certain banks try to influence the public and government by their funded media and newspapers (Duverger & Y, 1972, pp. 113-114).

“No doubt, there are black sheep in the profession with tendentious editors, mischievous reporters and columnist, carrying price-tags. But such elements are found in other sections of the society. The press does not demand any extra safeguards or any protective legislation. It needs an agreement among all political forces in power and in opposition to protect freedom of the press, in spite of the professional shortcomings” (Niazi, 1992, p. 170).

Media provides a forum for people to put their demands in front of government (Ungar, 1990, p. 371). Public protests are highlighted even it goes to the extreme where terrorists' acts and violent protests are shown (Janda, Berry, & Goldman, 2009, p. 190). Beginning of new era in media history is considered the year of 2002. After 2002 the television section felt liberation. Radio sector was also growing but it was a main source of information in rural areas. People use unusual techniques to draw the attention of the media. Sometimes

hunger strikes can better attract the attention of the people (Jones & Kavanagh, 1987, p. 159). If we look at the scenario how Musharraf came in power we see that Nawaz Shareef wanted to make General Ziauddin Butt as Army Chief who was then ISI Chief. Top military leadership was against this decision and supported Pervaiz Musharraf. On October 12, 1999 Musharraf the Army Chief ousted elected Prime Minister of Pakistan Mr. Nawaz Shareef. Musharraf devised a new term of Chief Executive for himself that was not used in constitutional history of Pakistan. General Pervaiz Musharraf did not touch the office of the President till 20th of June 2001 when he swore into office. Press and media of Pakistan gained strength with the passage of time and now the media of Pakistan is far stronger and freer than the previous decades. General Musharraf's era is very much different from the Zia's era. Now the hundreds of channels are watched by the Pakistani people and this era of media and global telecommunication is entirely different from the previous military eras of Pakistan (Zaidi, 2011, p. 21).

Press has always been vigilant in reflecting public opinion and suggesting government about its course of action (Janda, Berry, & Goldman, 2009, pp. 187-188). In Musharraf era media faced many hurdles. No doubt Musharraf was the person who first time in the history of Pakistan allowed private news channels (Jabbar, 2008, p. 46). But when he realised media was raising voice against his dictatorial rule, he tried to snub the media through different means. Many Raid and attacks on newspaper (media offices) were reported during this tenure. Many journalists lost their lives during his era; a large number of journalists were arrested and punished. Many of journalists harassed, threatened and physically tortured by the law enforcement agencies during Musharraf tenure

Enlighten moderation of Musharraf broadened Pakistan's media sector. Pakistan Media Regulatory Authority was made in 2002. The purpose of this law was to regulate the operation of broadcast of private television channels. During the Lawyer's Movement PEMRA Laws were made strict with some amendments. Amended PEMRA Law 2007 allows authorities to confiscate the property and equipment of the channel that were involved in violation of the rules. Government withdrew its support in the shape of advertisement. . During the years of 2007-2008 Lawyers' movement was on its peak. Media was highlighting the lawyer's movement. Some of the TV anchors were banned and these anchors conducted their shows on roads. Eighty eight newspaper faced denial of official advertisements during 2007-2008. So overall media raised its voice against the undemocratic acts of Musharraf government and faced its consequences. The movement of 2007 was popular; the electronic media played a major part. When operation in Baluchistan and Waziristan was started, media was in the line of fire and facing attacks. Media remained courageous and many journalists lost their lives (Zaidi, 2011, p. 69).

Musharraf gave his resignation on 18th of august 2008 and Zardari sworn in as new President later on. Zardari was reluctant to restore the judiciary again and was being criticised by the civil society. Changing circumstances suggested a way for lawyers to arrange themselves again and start a movement with a new name as Lawyer's Movement previously movement's name was 'Save the Judiciary'. There was tense situation in Punjab after imposing governor rule by Zardari government. A campaign was launched by Geo Tv where previous interviews and clips of PPP's leaders showed about the restoration of Judiciary and remained unfulfilled. Impact of this campaign was massive and government tried to stop the transmission of Geo Tv in different areas (Media support, 2009). Sherry Rehman, the then Minister of Information, resigned when Zardari government imposed

restrictions on media. Beside above mentioned incidents Mr. Zardari in his tenure took such measures that strengthened parliamentary democracy in Pakistan (Misra, 2012, p. 16). In 2010 Cable Operators were ordered to block certain channels on broadcasting political sensitive material (Schoemaker & Emrys, 2013).

Conclusion

Free press serves as warning light and identifies the problems. It better serves the societies where opposition is weak and opposition groups are not allowed to operate freely. (Ungar, 1990, p. 369). The only hope is independent media if it plays its effective role to turn the society. Zamir Niazi discussed the report of Press Commission 1959 in his book *the Press in Chains*. These were the laws introduced by the Colonial government and later on adopted by the Civilian and Military governments of Pakistan. Press and Registration of Books Act 1867, State (Protection Against Disaffection) Act, 1922, Official Secret Act, 1923, Press Emergency Powers Act 1931, Foreign Relations Act , 1932, States Protection Act, 1934, Penal Code that was Indian Penal Code 1860 and implemented in Pakistan with some changes, Code of Criminal Procedure 1898, Sea Customs Act, 1885, Telegraph Act, 1885, Post Office Act, 1898, were the Laws that were made in Colonial era but used against the Press even after the post-Colonial era. These were the laws that were made in the Civilian regimes like Provincial Public Safety Act, 1949, Security of Pakistan Act, 1952(Niazi, 2009, p. 164)

A long experience of media in Pakistan shows that it remained anti to government at most of the time. Press remained vigilant before partition and after partition on the issues of the common person. Media raised voice against the dictatorial regimes in Pakistan. Civilian and military governments made such laws that curbed the freedom of the press. These were the same laws that were devised by the Colonial rulers to curb the voice of the native people. But it was pathetic that the democratic governments used these colonial laws after the creation of Pakistan. As Free media safeguards the public interests, empowers the people and strengthen right to information. Free media, tolerance and freedom of expression are key properties of a liberal political system. There is dire need that such laws should be made that ensure the freedom of press. Right to information makes a society inclusive and ensures transparency and accountability in the society

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