

M Abdul Hafiz

DEMOCRACY IN THE THIRD WORLD: MYTH OR REALITY?

Since the dawn of twentieth century the story of democracy has been one of considerable success. Considering the long and chequered history of its evolution over last two and half millienia it made impressive scores by the close of the first World War when there were at least twenty two democracies in the world out of sixty four independent nation states at that time.¹ It survived the stagnation of the great depression and in both the World Wars in which democratic ideals were among the issues of conflicts it emerged on the winning side. At least three major democracies of today's world e.g., Germany, Italy and Japan could be salvaged following the consequences of the War. During post World War II period the wave of rapid decolonisation and national liberation was accompanied, among other things, by sweeping democratic aspirations and most leaders of national independence seemed committed to liberal democracy and were eager to uphold the democratic ideals.

This trend did not however last long. Once the euphoria of the freedom movement was over, the great mass of the population in the Third World found themselves once again in shackles only with the change of masters. A distinct mood of authoritarianism emerged in the countries of the Third World although many of them maintained a democratic facade. The new leaders of the Third World countries

1. Powell G. Bingham, Jr, *Contemporary Democracies*, Harvard University Press, 1982, p.2

lost no time to consolidate their power. They moved swiftly to take measures often harsh and authoritarian to eliminate all possible opposition to their authorities. The new ruling elites of these countries were bent upon perpetuating their rule once they got taste of power. Political restrictions and repressive measures were introduced in the name of national integration, security and development. In the process, fundamental rights were suspended and established democratic norms were ignored while human rights violations became rampant. The leaders with charisma found it expedient to be elected directly in a specially devised presidential system rather than carrying along the burden of a parliament in a Westminster type of democracy.

Some of them craftily switched from multiparty to one party rule monopolising all political power while eliminating opposition parties through coercion and series of mergers. Even if more political parties were allowed in some of these countries they were merely symbolic at places and transfer of power to opposition political party remained an elusive goal. A recent study on democracies omits countries like Malaysia and Singapore from the list of contemporary democracies² on the same plea although there exist opposition political parties, regular elections and other democratic practices in those countries. Through various tricks and political gimmickries the ruling party often retains its supremacy and the opposition is gradually reduced to a position of total despondency. In such a regime "it combines democratic constitution ...with a situation in which the formation of opposition groups is not hampered by legislation or police action but where the incomparable authority of the government party based on its leadership in national revolution leaves no effective chance for the development of political alternatives".³

It is cynically observed that "all too frequently fledgeling African democracies have become victim to leaders intent solely on gaining

2. *Ibid*, p.6

3. Ehrmann Henry W. Ed., *Democracy in Changing Society*, Bombay, India, 1963, p.229

and holding power.”⁴ The observation can be safely generalised to include Asia and Latin America where the picture is equally grim may be with variation in form and style. In Latin America by one estimate only four countries e.g. Costa Rica, Venezuela, Uruguay and Jamaica limp forward through a democratic process. The balance sheet remains unchanged for long with Chile lost to democracy in

In a large number of countries democracy suffered setback when the military stepped in taking cognizance of politicians' inability to tackle enormous problems of socio-economic development and national integration.

1973 and a shaky Argentina brought back recently in its fold. Although Asia boasts of the world's largest democracy i.e. India, it nevertheless tasted emergency rule as late as in mid-seventies. Five other democracies of Asia barring Japan are not without a scar. Following massive guerilla attacks in 1971 the Sri Lankan democracy suffered a setback due to imposition of restrictions on press and assembly. The military stepped in Turkey in 1980 while there was prolonged Martial Law in Philippines.

In a large number of countries in the wake of abysmal economic and administrative mismanagement by the inept and corrupt politicians the military had to step in with democratic process suspended. One of the first cracks to democracy during post war time occurred in Pakistan in 1958 when a parliamentary democracy was overthrown by the military and its leader announced that “western type of democracy can not function here under present conditions”⁵. Similar crises occurred almost simultaneously in Tunisia, Ghana and Burma⁶. The trend continued and by now almost 65 countries out of 125 developing

4. *Time*, January 16, 1984, p. 8

5. Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man*, Heinemann, London, 1983, p.85

6. *Ibid*, p, 85

nations, most of which constitute the Third World, have come under military regime. Apart from putting the economy of the country back on rail in most places, the military moved in either to save or restore democracy. The model of democracy they presented on assumption of power could not however develop legitimised political institutions on long term basis,⁷ although at places, there are instances of much better performance on the part of military leaders in invoking popular support for their programme and achieving rapid economic development.

“Strongman” regimes continue to emerge in Asia and Africa in the form of presidential or military regimes with no sign of abatement of the trend. Whether this type of authoritarian rule is the product of colonial legacy, socio-economic compulsions, existing political tradition or inevitable phase of transition to constitutional political system is still being debated. In the meantime strong justification also is being put forward in favour of prevailing order. Some political scientists feel that most Afro-Asian countries are committed deeply to certain tempo of economic development than they are to the pattern of party politics and free elections which exemplify a democratic order. It is widely felt that with the pressure of rapid industrialisation and immediate solution of chronic economic problems it is unlikely that many of the new governments in Asia and Africa will be able to support an open party system. “Given the existence of poverty-stricken masses, low levels of education, and elongated left, the prognosis of political democracy in Asia and Africa is bleak”⁸

This skepticism is deepening leading the Third World to a state of despair. The questions that such experience gives rise to is both pertinent and agonising: Is it then that democracy has failed in the Third World? Where have these countries gone wrong? What are the impediments to democracy in these countries? Can an environ be created here for the restoration and growth of

7. Talukder Moniruzzaman, “Civilianisation of Military Regimes : A Comparative Analysis” *BIISS Journal* Vol. 1 No. 1 p. 40

8. *Politican Man*, *op. cit.*, p. 84

democracy? This paper will attempt to answer some of these questions faced by a disillusioned Third World.

For this purpose evolution of democracy will be viewed first in a historical perspective. Next the conditions for sustained growth of democracy will be examined. Thereafter we shall analyse the prevailing factors that impede its growth and development. And finally we attempt an assessment of democracy in the Third World.

A Historical Perspective

For any meaningful assessment of democracy it needs to be viewed in its historical perspective. Before it is done what is, after all, democracy? While the historical records do provide accounts of the origin and evolution of democracy, it has always been difficult to define it. Democracy lacks a precise definition not only because it is both a theory of politics and an actual government mechanism, but also because it does not have doctrinal source, neither can it be referred to an ideological matrix. Political scientists have however tried to explain it in various manner which in any case did not help to pin it down to anything definite. It has been viewed as "both a set of ideals and a political system"⁹, "rather a byproduct of the entire development of western civilization", "a way of living"¹⁰ or ".....a political system which seeks to steer movement of society towards its concept of civilization"¹¹. A relatively specific definition is provided by Lipset who while defining democracy calls it ".....a political system which supplies regular constitutional opportunities for changing the governing officials, and a social mechanism which permits the largest possible part of the population to influence major decisions by choosing among contenders for political office"¹².

9. *International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, Vol. 3, Collier-Macmillan Publishers, London, 1972, p. 112

10. *Ibid*, p.117

11. Lipson Leslie, *The Democratic Civilization*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1964. p. 569.

12. *Political Man*, *op. cit.*, p. 27

There are many more definitions and ways of looking at democracy. The viewpoints on what democracy is really differ and many new ideas on it continue to grow. There are truths and rationale in each of these viewpoints and none of the ideas generated on democracy can be set aside as irrelevant. The quarters advancing explanations of democracy range from democracies of the 'free world' to the 'people's democracies' or 'democratic republics' of the communist world—all claiming themselves to be the best models of democracy. And all them are equally eloquent in defending the 'democratic elements' of all their system. Consequently the term democracy has undergone such a conceptual stretching that it has started to create difficulties in drawing line between systems democratic and non-democratic. Such stretching of views continues with the emergence of many new nation states and with their experience of democracy. What however has remained consistent till date is the set of democratic values loosely labelled "individualism"—anchored in human instinct and the process of their finding expression throughout the history. We would like to have a cursory glance at that fascinating history with a view only to finding out its salients so far as the growth and development of democracy and the characteristics of such growth are concerned.

The term *demokratia* (peoples' strength) was first coined in Greece in 6th Century B.C. Its foundation was laid in the powerful city state of Athens where democracy for the first time in history developed and matured as a political concept between sixth and fourth centuries B.C. During those two centuries the Athenians did a great deal to construct and operate the machinery of democratic government. The Athenian achievements did not have any parallel before the advent of seventeenth century. They theorised the principles and invented its institutions. Committed to the creation of a good society the Athenian intelligentsia statesman, fertile with ideas, reasoned and argued. The inspirational tone of Athenian democratic accomplishments continued to educate the generations down to our own. From Herodotus to Aristotle, a protracted debate went on

over the system of democracy and its ideals through illuminating writings of contemporary Greek authors, philosophers, historians and politicians. After Aristotle however the Greek analysis of democracy came to an end as democracy practically ceased to exist following the conquests of Philip and Alexander. What was however noticeable about the debate covering more than a century was considerable extent of agreement about what constituted a democratic system.

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Athenian experiments were perhaps initiated too early to endure but it was destined to be revived at a subsequent date when circumstances were more promising for its development. The Athenian flicker of democracy had a lingering glow and was, in fact, never extinguished. "Prevented by its small size from meeting military and economic conditions of survival, unable to adapt its institution to a larger population and territory, democracy revealed its potentialities in the *Polis* and then disappeared from view"¹³

After the Athenian experience of democracy it remained only in Greek literature mostly as an abusive epithet. "Through all the centuries that elapsed from the eclipse of the *Polis* to democracy's relatively modern rebirth those who wrote political theory judged and generalized about democracy in the terms made classic by the Greeks"¹⁴. So it was no surprise that there was little change in the conception of democracy in the course of next two thousand years as evident from the works of most celebrated political thinkers of seventeenth and eighteenth century. Hobbes, Locke, Montesquieu, Rousseau and Madison revitalised one or another aspect of democratic ideals through their writings, but they remained deeply influenced in their work by Greek

13. *The Democratic Civilization, op. cit.*, p. 38

14. *Ibid*, p.40

literature as they had no model of working democracy in front of them. So at the time of American and French Revolutions the interpretation of democracy degenerated into stereotype and sterility. A historical interaction of developments in theoretical doctrines, the pioneering of new institutions and revolutionary changes in society resulted however in a fresh and vigorous reexamination of democracy's criteria. It was by this time that opposition grew against the temporal corruption of the church ; scientific experiments and rational inquiry led to the questioning of all established dogma ; new economic opportunities generated new wealth and called for the construction of society ; the excesses of the monarchy provoked rebellion ; inventions in science and navigation opened all oceans and continents to communication or conquest and certain personalities with revolutionary ideas emerged in certain places. Because of all these factors some of which acted directly and some indirectly the circle of political participants was enlarged. This subsequently contributed towards democratisation of the society in Europe and North America where such convulsions were taking place. Although none of the political thinkers mentioned earlier labelled their philosophy as that of democracy various divergent doctrines evolved by them "were swept up and thrown together as the modern democratic avalanche gathered momentum".¹⁵ This in short was the background of the emergence of democracy in modern times. As it was born in one leading *Polis* of ancient Greece by coincidence of events it was again by chance that a series of trends combining by historical juxtaposition in seventeenth and eighteenth centuries upset and recast the traditional modes of governance in Europe. And that set the pace for democratic stride unhindered uptill present time.

A close study of this history would reveal a few characteristic features about democracy and its development. First, democratic ideas and institutions developed over a long period. It took two and half thousand years to evolve the system and it filtered through many trials and errors. Second, it evolved very slowly over time and matured very recently. When put in practice democracy did not accomplish anything

15. *Ibid*, p.47

overnight. The steps were cautious and the achievements were few and far between. Even in case of Athens, the first step towards democratic system was taken by Solon in 193 B.C. The second step embodied in the reforms of Cleisthenes did not occur until the end of that century. The third step came in the innovations of Pericles and Ephialtes after another half a century. Third, the path of democracy was violent for those who were earliest to move into the system. Even in Athens *demokratia* was introduced by wresting power from the few. Democracy when reborn in seventeenth and eighteenth century was accomplished through same violent means everywhere. "The Dutch fight for national liberation, England's civil war, the Swiss struggle against their cantonal and city oligarchies, the American war of independence and the French Revolution, all were birth pang of modern democratic state".¹⁶ Because the foundation of some of the democracies were laid in uprisings it was later possible to achieve the same through less or no violence as exemplified by introduction of democracy in Canada, Australia or in defeated countries after the right of suffrage, one of the earliest criteria of democracy was not enjoyed even by any major democracies till the end of last century. In England which transformed from royal absolutism through an aristocratic form into a mass democracy the process of such participation was considered relatively faster. Mass participation in continental Europe was possible only by the close of the first World War. In most places the absolute monarchies, aristocracies and plutocracies lost their exclusive privileges in successive states, i.e. 1830 and 1884 and then between 1890-1914. In the USA democracy sprang up earlier and was able to mature faster. However, it was only in 1920 that presidential election in the USA was for the first time held on the basis of adult suffrage. Fifth, full democracy as we understand it today is a phenomenon of a very recent development. It was only by the end of the first World War that political equality was brought to women in the United States as in Great Britain. The enfranchisement of women started earlier in parts of rocky west of the United States where they had a bargaining power because of their rarity in number.

16. *Ibid*, p.78

Thus it is seen that full democracy is a very recent phenomenon. How painfully slow the process has been can be gauged from the fact that even democracies like Austria, Italy, Japan or West Germany are still considered "garbed in the outer accoutrements of democracy". All these countries had limited experience with democratic institutions prior to the world war II and after the resumption of democratic process at the end of the occupation period only one party or essentially the same coalition has so far continuously controlled each of these countries.¹⁷ In socio-economically backward but politically advanced Latin America most of which were independent by the close of the last century only a few countries contain democratic potential. Brazil, Chile and Mexico which have evolved certain democratic institutions "still exhibit profound oligarchic tendencies". France also for a while reverted to one man dictatorship after the collapse of parliamentarism as late as in 1958.

Conditions Facilitating Growth of Democracy

The success of democracy presupposes the existence of certain conditions which in varying degrees help either the growth or development of democracy. There seems to be no fixed set of such conditions. Social scientists differ as to what exactly they are and the priority in which they are to be treated. Some think that both democracy and its favouring conditions are complementary to each other. One grows only because of the existence of the other and vice versa. Whether a successful democracy is the result of these conditions or it (democracy) precedes them is still debated. Most of political scientists however agree that simultaneous presence of both democracy and the favouring conditions in a society is immensely helpful to each other and both can grow then richly and faster. Lipset argues that two characteristics of the society i.e. economic development and legitimacy bear heavily on the problem of a stable democracy¹⁸. These conditions, particularly economic development, are common to the thinking of many others.

17. *Ibid*, p.86

18. *Political Man*, *op. cit.*, p.28

Economic Development

There is a great propensity to correlate the condition of democracy to a given stage of socio-economic development. As per Lipset: "The more well-to-do a nation, the greater the chance that it will sustain democracy"¹⁹. There are evidences that the usual indices of economic development i.e. wealth, urbanisation, degree of industrialisation and education are certainly more in more democratic countries. But it does not serve as a constant guide when we see that economically developed countries are always not necessarily a democratic state. Germany and Italy were among the highly developed countries when they fell prey to dictatorial regimes. Pre-war Japan with its stage of advancement also drifted away from democratic rationale. As against them an impoverished India successfully experimented with it ensuring at least five peaceful transfers of powers so far. An equally backward Sri Lanka in socio-economic development exhibited a matured transition through democratic process. True, prosperity brings in an equilibrium in the society by moderating the tension of class struggle and thereby helps to sustain democracy. But in the similar way this equilibrium can also stabilize a dictatorship. Moreover, there is a great deal of controversy as to whether economic development precedes democracy or the latter creates environ for an economic boost. England became democratic at least having a constitutional government much before it attained industrialisation, prosperity and literacy.

Similar argument can be put forward regarding another component of economic development i.e. education. It is widely argued that most important single factor in promoting democracy is education. Experience shows that there is a positive relationship between stable democracy and degree of literacy. Most of the countries having higher literacy have faired well in increasing the democratic potentials of those countries. It is because education "presumably broadens men's outlook, enables him to understand the need for the norms

19. *Ibid*, p.31

of tolerance, restrains him from adhering to extreme doctrines, and increases his capacity to make rational electoral choices"²⁰. Educated peoples' views on tolerance for the opposition, attitudes towards ethnic minorities and racial discrimination and feelings for multiparty system have often been one that favour democratic values. But there are pitfalls. Education, in itself, brings only an exposure to communication. So literacy can be conducive to mass manipulation no less than constructive self-realisation. Both Germany and Italy were among the most educated societies but one succumbed to rise of third Reich under Hitler and another turned fascist. Even today none of them is considered a stable democracy by western criterion of having "genuine alternation in office between rivals equally loyal to democracy"²¹.

The degree of urbanisation is in many ways linked with the state of democracy in a country. The growth of some of the institutions of democracy including autonomous private organisations is possible only in an urban society. Laski went to the extent of asserting that "organized democracy is the product of urban life". Whether it is totally so or not, urbanisation has a lot to do as regard healthy and quick growth of democracy. It is not without a reason that the first democracy of the history made its appearance in a Greek city state. Only when urbanisation comes it is accompanied by skills and resources required for modern industrial economy. Then come literacy and media growth which are complementary to each other. Thus a society gets prepared for democratic adaptation. Industrialisation and democracy are closely linked. Democracy and representative governments are the product of industrial culture and related to industrial mode of production"²². The western democracy got a boost with the Industrial Revolution. Industrially advanced nations are among the best democracies of the world. The measure

20. *Ibid*, p.39

21. *The Democratic Civilization, op. cit*, p.86

22. K. Subrahmanyam, "Safeguarding the Republic" *Strategic Analysis*, February 1984, Vol VII/II, p.878

of democratic achievements of India, the second largest industrial country among developing nations is of significance.

Tocqueville viewed independent structure of independent organisations and voluntary associations to be necessary precondition for democracy. Many such organisations sprang up among the clusters of early European settlements in America where democratising process was hastened by such agencies. Local self-government introduced in

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British India by Britain was considered a great step towards successful growth of democracy and its functioning in India even afterwards. Broadly speaking the development of a large middle class who are functionaries in these organisations is a very important ingredient of the whole process.

Turning to the political preconditions one cannot help stressing the crucial importance of leadership. The effectiveness of democracy at least in the initial stage depends first and foremost on the efficiency and skill of its leadership. Nehru and Bengurion were largely responsible in shaping democracy in their countries while initiation of democracy and its successful functioning in some other countries—even if temporary were due to their first generation leaders. Giovanni Sartori suggests that the will of an efficient leadership and regulation of the flow of demands “as two very important conditions for initiating a democracy”²³. It is because of sudden imbalance between outburst of expectation and the capacity for meeting them that a democracy can be put off balance.

It has however to be remembered that the conditions of advanced democracy are not those of initial democracy or for merely planting it. Open class system, an egalitarian value system and an

23. *International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, op. cit, p. 119

industrial society are certainly not conditions required for taking off into democracy or even for normal democracy. Third World countries often went wrong by importing models from the West which were hardly relevant to their respective social and cultural context.

Legitimacy

The stability of a democracy depends a great deal upon the legitimacy of its political system which implies that the system should be capable enough to engender and maintain the belief that the existing political institutions are the most appropriate ones for the society. Legitimacy is the foundation of such governmental powers as is exercised both with consciousness on the government's part that it has right to govern and with some recognition by the governed of that right. The crisis of legitimacy cropped up in recent times when sharp cleavages among various social groups were pronounced to the extent that these groups could, because of easy mass communication, organise around different values. And this crisis is largely the function of social change. It occurs during a transition to new social structure and even after it if the new system is unable to fulfill the expectations of major groups for long. Various social groups view a political system as legitimate or otherwise according to the way in which its (system's) values fit in with theirs. For example, Weimer Republic (in pre-war Germany) was rejected by important segments of the military, civil service and aristocracies because their values and ideals were negated by those of the Weimer. During the social changes if the status of major conservative group is not threatened, even though they lose most of their power, the system of democracy seems to be much more secure. Examples are the major democracies of the world which are also at the same time monarchies. The retention of monarchies has apparently helped these democracies in achieving the loyalty of aristocracies, traditionalist, and clerical sectors of population which of course, in the beginning resented increased democratisation and social equality.

Impediments to Third World Democracy

Do the conditions discussed exist in the Third World to sustain democracy? An impoverished Third World with its abysmal poverty can hardly provide an economic base for its growth and development. Majority of population steeped in ignorance fall far short of having ability for democratic judgements. With industrial infrastructure lacking the urbanisation is a far cry. Even where urbanisation has developed most city dwellers consist of unemployed and illiterate squatters. Under such circumstances it is only expected that the path of democracy will not be smooth. After all, "one must treat the political system of any country a more expression of its level of social development".²⁴ The level of socio-economic development is too low to sustain a sophisticated political system like democracy. Wherever the pace of this development has been faster with equitable distribution of wealth it did show promise for democracy. But "a society divided between a large impoverished mass and a small favoured elite"—a common feature of social structure in many Third World countries—"results in oligarchy (dictatorial rule of small upper stratum) or in tyranny (popular based dictatorship)".²⁵ Such social inequality breeds one or other form of authoritarianism as evident in Thailand, oil rich gulf states and some Latin American countries.

To make things worse, no less pervasive has been the political underdevelopment often exacerbated by endemic instability. Violent conflicts over sectarian, ethnic, religious and tribal differences make it difficult to initiate a political process or sustain its continuity. At places such process is thwarted by protracted guerilla activities, insurgencies or clashes between various social and regional groups. As a result no political institution can be built or sustained where inherited. Except for past British colonies where local self government, and cooperatives were introduced majority of the Third World countries lack such institution which in a predominantly rural society

24. *Democracy in a Changing Society, op. cit, p.200*

25. *Political Man, op. cit, p.31*

in the Third World can play a vital role in ensuring mass participation in the political process.

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negates the spirit of democracy. By and large the leadership is inept and rarely capable of understanding new dynamics of the society and tackling with them. In the absence of a social consensus as to the legitimate ends and means of political action often a regime manipulates a stamp of legitimacy in its favour,

External influences more often than not marred the prospects of a budding democracy in the Third World. The rivalry between super powers directly or indirectly affected the democratic process. It is well-known that in international politics strategic consideration gets preference over commitment to respective ideologies. Ironically western democracies often supported nondemocratic regimes whereas obviously the socialists have no ideological binding in supporting a democratic movement. The authoritarian rulers also took the advantage of such situation and played one super power against another in seeking support for their dictatorial rule. The cases in point are Idi Amin enjoying support of Soviet Union and Pol Pot regime being treated as legitimate by US. Apart from this the super powers openly supported any regime when they found it expedient for their interest. Also in their quest for resource availability, access to strategic facilities etc super powers found it more convenient to deal with an authoritarian

ruler with whom the decision making is centralised rather than dealing with broad based democratic setup.²⁶

One way and heavy dependence on aid giving countries and agencies at times proved dangerous for a democratic system. The despondency of the country heavily dependant on aid givers for its economic survival is easily exploited by the aid giving country if the latter finds it rewarding to do so.

An Assessment of Democratic Achievement in Third World

The achievements can be assessed by the yardstick of expected standards for democracy. These standards are different for different stages of development of it. We are concerned here as to what is the expected standard for democracy in the developing countries? What do we after all expect to happen to democracy in the Third World context? How and where can the line be drawn between systems democratic and non-democratic in these countries? The political scientists place Anglo-American and Scandinavian democracies in a 'high' standard which denotes more of an achievement in terms of democratic civilization as well as state of society. Whereas the standard is 'low' in unstable democracies a few of which are even in Europe. In the former democracy is more than a political machinery while in the latter the 'polity qualifies as democracy because of its democratic machinery not its achievement.²⁷ However, even in these democracies people enjoy, if not much of equality, a considerable amount of liberty as manifested through free election, a competitive party system and a representative system of government. There is yet another standard which ensure a constitutional as opposed to arbitrary government's guaranteeing some measure of political freedom, personal security and impartial justice. And this is what is considered an 'average' standard for most of the world²⁸ It is presumed that the mere existence of a constitu-

26. K. Subrahmanyam, *Strategic Analysis*, *op. cit.*, p.880

27. *International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, *op. cit.*, p.117

28, *Ibid*, p. 118

tional government as an indicator of democracy is quite in keeping with conditions prevailing in the Third World.

If these are standards for various stages of democratic development let us turn to the Third World to see how has it fared in its experiment with democracy. As democratic ideals and institutions pervaded Europe during eighteenth and nineteenth centuries they filtered through or trickled down to colonies which the most of the Third World was. As of science and technology, the western colonial masters, mainly British and the French extended their political doctrine to other continent and cultures. As a result, over years of alien occupation and the struggle—constitutional or otherwise—for independence a democratic tradition was built up in many Third World countries. Although some of the colonies were introduced to democratic structure of administration as early as in middle of nineteenth century, most of the Third World countries started with their experiments with democracy only after their decolonisation with the close of World War II. Whether or not compatible with their genius and capacity they adopted democracy in its unbridled western form. Since then a little over three decades have elapsed. How they have performed is well-known. What does this performance reflect? A failure or a promise? Or both? Viewing this performance empirically against a bigger time frame we

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would argue that time is much too short to draw a conclusion or put a final verdict. In fact there is nothing ultimate in democracy. It keeps developing. The experiment with democracy has not ceased in the West even after several centuries of working with it. Still there is intense debate in the West seeking further and more improvement of it. Western democratic achievements were spread over

a long period and it took a considerable length of time to reach a standard that the western democracies enjoy today.

That democracy is not an easily attainable objective should be clearly understood. The world has produced only twenty nine working democracies out of 159 nation states upto now after two and a half thousand years of experiments with it. And then there could not be any fixed model of it. No two democracies are similar. The truth is that democracy upto now has always been the exception among political systems. It never was, and is not yet, the rule. Today as in the past the majority of the human race are still governed in an authoritarian fashion.

In the backdrop of such experience what happened to democracy in a few decades is insignificant. If the time is any yardstick no doom has as yet been spelt for democracy in the Third World. In this connection it may be borne in mind that the Third World experiment is compounded by the fact that the emergence of nation states and introduction of democracy was in most cases simultaneous. In Europe the nation states were evolved in 16th century and the process was accompanied by traumatic events. Another series of convulsion took place when the process of democratisation started in some of these countries. This development in phases reduced the intensity of the turbulence.

The local adaptation of democracy in the Third World with suitable modification has always been viewed as a serious breach and by some even a negation of democracy. There is a dangerous trend on the part of democratic West to 'export democracy' to developing countries where it has often come in violent clash with emerging Third World trend of achieving "democratisation without westernisation". While it was often forgotten that western "democratic constitutions cannot be exported like standard size, ready-to-wear clothing"²⁹ some developing countries with environ and problems entirely different from those of western democracies resorted to costly

29. Lennox A. Mills, *South East Asia*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1964, p.11

experiment with democracy and wasted a lot of crucial time and effort needed elsewhere. Unlike European and American democracies the new nations are confronted with situations peculiar only to them. It is obvious that democracy and its practice will be different in those countries without of course compromising the fundamental principles. This point is seldom understood in the West where people have reached a stage of democratic conservatism. So any deviation from western model is met with sweeping condemnation. In Malaysia, the country has a racial and insurgency problems which are deeply linked with the question of national integration and security. The politics of consensus is likely to grow in open party politics. Even if the ruling *Barisan Nasional* has guaranteed its apparently permanent rule in the country, it nevertheless has ensured a stable federation in a multiracial country for many years—a feature uncommon in the democracies in Third World. Democracy practised in Indonesia may be contradictory to one understood classically in the West but looking at the peculiarities of racial, ethnical and demographic problems of the archipelagic republic one tends to agree that there is rationale in constitutionally protected Armed Forces' role in Indonesia's national politics.

One single great achievement that has clearly been won for democracy in the Third World is that most of the nation states are at least constitutionally ruled. In the wake of this development in post—War period the element of absolutism and arbitrarism in the governance have been practically done away with. Even last few monarchies in Asia and Africa are constitutionally guided. Bhutan, Brunei, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and UAE are five absolute monarchies of which little is heard about human rights abuse. Rather these monarchies have mechanism to ensure some kind of welfare to their subjects. There are few cases of suspended constitution where military has recently stepped in. It is presumed that the restoration of constitution in those countries is a matter of only time.³⁰

30. This is based on the information gathered from *Political Handbook of the World : 1979*, McGraw-Hill Book Company, New York, 1979, *The World Almanac and Book of Facts 1983*, Newspaper Enterprise Association, Inc. New York.

The endemic instability in the Third World is sometime attributed to unstable or weak democracies. If democracy has not been stable, so has been the dictatorship whether of military or single party rule. If the democratisation process has a chance to be tried over a reasonable length of time it has a better chance of survival with more of legitimacy. No major social group is known to have challenged a democratic system in a country. On the contrary, the problem of legitimacy arose when a regime other than democratic imposed its will and system on a nation. Even under Third World condition democracy functioned well, of course, with usual turbulence typical of a nascent democracy until usurped by an ambitious person or group. Stability brought about by a dictator has always been deceptive. The stability Ayub Khan of Pakistan brought ended in disastrous upheaval of 1968-69. Sukarno's consolidation of power disintegrated in the wake of PKI uprising in 1965.

Dictatorial doctrine like fascism was bred after World War I in a very advanced society. As opposed to it Third World dictators following a variety of methods has not as yet caused the growth of a force that can challenge democracy as a system except for a short spell of Peronism i.e. lower class dictatorship in Argentina. Dictatorship in the Third World has, at best been a private venture on the part of a person or group. Seldom has there been an attempt either to formalise or institutionalise the system.

Rulers of some nations in the Third World turned authoritative with the plea that it was the only way to manage enormous economic problems of these countries and few seemed dispute such arguments. In spite of traditions in many of these countries there exists a small minority of native intellectuals capable of political thought and action. Even they genuinely felt that the radical progress through rapid industrialisation could only be achieved through authoritarian measures. And one feels convinced of this arguments seeing the economic developments made through such measures either in Singapore or South Korea. In a good number of countries it has been asserted by the ruling elite that political discipline is the price for progress so

badly needed in a developing country which ill affords the abuse of basic rights. Despite all such assertions none of these rulers ever opposed the values of democracy and its necessity. To them it is only the question of priority in consideration of prevailing situation in those countries. What should we then call them? Are they not democratic? While an answer can be found from some social scientists who are prepared in the Third World context to "speak of democracy simply to indicate that a given political system is not an overt dictatorship that allows no freedom, opposition and no independence to the court"³¹. This is not the final reduction of standard. There are yet some scholars like Edward Shils who talked of 'tutelary' democracy implying that the standard can be reduced to the extent that the ruling elite earnestly profess democratic beliefs and pursue the goal of future establishment of some kind of democratic structure. We wonder if there is any dictator in the Third World today who goes even below that expected standard of democracy. It is however not to suggest that democracy in the Third World is only worth that pitiful standard; neither it is correct that many Third World rulers fall in that category.

Some of the optimisms expressed is based on historical perspective of democracy and not on its performance. They do not suggest that the state of things is in favour of democracy. In fact, a hard struggle lies ahead to make democracy a success in these countries.

The Third World countries are moving in phases towards the common goal of an aspired system which will fashion their socio-economic and political life. It is only expected that they will be swept in the mainstream of the historical process of democracy.

The most desirable thing to happen is to let the process of democracy continue even if it creates deadlocks at times. After all, it is, according to Woodrow Wilson the most difficult form of Government. We

31. *International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences, op. cit, p. 118*

can make it function only by letting it function. Democracy can not be withheld awaiting a favourable socio-economic conditions to prevail. Most of the conditions discussed in this paper are for finer development of democracy and not for just initiating it. For late starter like us there is at least one clear advantage. It may be possible to hasten the democratic process by making short cuts on the basis of so many available models without of course compromising its fundamental spirit.

The crisis of leadership is one very important factor that has seriously wrecked the process of democracy. Democracies in the Third World were led well in the past by their first generation leaders imbued with the ideals and values of democracy. Nineteenth century Europe characterised by great democratic ferment saw these leaders from colonial countries in the midst of revolutionary events in some European countries. They played invaluable role in leading democratic nationalist movement in their countries and laid the foundation of democratic order. With their waning out the political arena of Third world suffers from a leadership vacuum which is difficult to fill. For us there is indeed no alternative to skilled political leaders in compensating for many other deficiencies for initiating democracy and its subsequent nourishments.

In the prevailing political process in almost all the emerging and socio-economically underdeveloped Third World countries the traditional socio-political systems and values are passing into various transitional stages largely influenced by their search for a new and better system. The search continues and it will be wrong to treat this transition as a terminal phenomenon. In European society the transition to democratic order had been long and arduous and it took them several generations to emerge democratic. Under Third World conditions the path is likely to be still more uphill. But each nation in crisis evolves its own dynamics to move forward towards its goal. The Third World countries also are moving in phases towards the common goal of an aspired system which will fashion their socio-economic and political life. Time alone will dictate how close will be their aspirations

to the ideals and institutions of democracy. It is however a system which in course of its long history has been practised in so many states, has contributed so much to the political development of mankind and incorporated so large a segment of human history that with all its records—good or bad—still holds great promise for the future. It is only expected that the Third World will be swept in the mainstream of this historical process of democracy. What however will be of interest is whether Third World will come out with new ideals, values and institutions of democracy specifically rooted in their own experience.