DEMOCRATIZATION AND STATE BUILDING: A CONUNDRUM IN KRGYZSTAN

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Abstract

The unprepared independent Kyrgyz republic faced much political turmoil since independence. In order to bring stability the reformist president Akayev adopted enormous provisions but unluckily all seemed short before the threat to the state. Opposition primarily came from his own party in the parliament who were opposed to the reforms of Akayev. They wanted to embed with soviet policies. Being a small, land locked and mountainous state faced economic fall out in 1994. But the president was chained helplessly in his hand. And by and large the economic condition was also demolished by the president himself. After independence he followed the language policy which made compulsory the learning of Kyrgyz language. So there was huge migration of Russians, Kazakhs, Jews, Turks, and Uzbeks to their own state. Importantly they were contributing to the development of state being resided in urban areas. Ethnic conflict predominantly contributed for the upheaval of the state.

Keyword: - (Kyrgyz Republic, Political Turmoil, Representative, Liberal Democracy, Decentralization).

Introduction

Democracy has been a common place contemporary conventional wisdom from a political philosopher to journalist, mainly after the dissolution of communist regime of the eastern bloc, it rules supreme and unquestionable in the pantheon of political values. The language of democracy is too deeply embedded in contemporary political discourses and it has become itself the inevitable and inescapable battleground for the contemporary political debate. Democracy is a worldwide phenomenon. It is nothing but just a form of government. It is quiet conspicuous that hails its authority from the people, exercised by the people and work for interests of the people. And Representative is nothing but just presents the view on behalf of the people and works for the benefit for them (Becker, 2008). They are also held accountable for their each act to the state. This word has been defined by many political scientists but the most appropriated definition was given by the former President of U.S. Abraham Lincoln as “democracy is of the people, by the people and for the people”.

Theories of democracy

The term democracy can be traced back to the 6th century which was found in Athens’s (a city of Greek state). The full credit for the invention of the honorific connotation goes to the people of Greek. But ironically Plato a Greek philosopher denounced this as a worst form of government. Deprivation of the minority from the privileges was his reason for the discontentment over this government. Then Aristotle, even the father of political science placed democracy in the perverted form of government of his six fold classification of government. There are various theories of government. Liberal democracy holds the first position as it is adopted by the western countries such as U.S, Britain, France, Italy, and Germany etc. Normally Individual receives more priority since he is the fulcrum of this government. There has
been restricted of government interference in individual freedom. The government is only allowed to that extent where the citizen needs for its assistance. The prominent exponents of this theory are John Locke and Jeremy Bentham. Locke in his “Two treaties (1690)” argued that the government responsibility is to escort the rights of the citizens. Those rights are right to life, liberty and property. Similarly French philosopher Jean Jacque Rousseau in his “Social contract (1762)”, added some new ideas with Locke’s view and suggested for the distinction of religion and state and right of resistance against oppressor. Bentham also defends this government from the utilitarian ground. He expressed his allegiance with Locke. He believed that liberal democracy should be based on equal franchise, i.e., one-man one vote principle, regular elections, secret ballot, and competition between parties and leaders, majority rule, etc.

The second form of government is Marxist-Leninist democracy. It depends on the principle of dictatorship of proletariat and creates a socialistic society. Economic right of the individual finds more important than the political right. A typical example of such type of democracy is the erstwhile Soviet Union. There is another form of democracy which has been prevailed in third world countries such as Asia, Africa and Latin America. After being independent from their colonial power they have adopted a new type of democracy. The executive power is vested on the military head or on the authoritarian president relegating the political institutions like judiciary or parliament. This type of government is commonly found in Pakistan, Nepal, North Korea, Central Asian republic, Myanmar and many others in Africa and Latin America.

So far as consolidation of state is concerned it only takes place in a democratic state. By and large the state hails its authority from people and it is the sole responsibility of the state to be custodian of the life, liberty and property of people. If it fails to discharge its duty then draws upheaval among citizens. This fury is induced detrimental to both the state and the citizens. However, in order to prove democracy successful, it requires the state to be built in a systematic and well to do manner. State building is a measure, aims at subside the violence and conciliate the resented people, develop the capacity at all levels to strengthen the conflict measurement lay the foundation for sustainable peace and development. It is a process helps to enhance the capacity, institution and legitimacy of the state. So regarding to all these, it can be said, the intensity of democracy leads to state consolidation.

**Democracy and state building processes in Kyrgyzstan**

It is a long day’s endeavor by the Kyrgyz people to set up a well functioned constitutional system through an organized political mechanism. Prior to the political culture in their democratic process it is needed to understand the historical scenario of Central Asia. Let’s have a brief look on it which has a great impact on present day’s democracy and state building processes. These are:

- The Arab invasion and conquest of the Central Asia and spread of Islam in the eighth century
- The Mongol-Tatar invasion and conquest of Central Asia in the twelfth century and subsequent assimilation and Islamization
- The rise and fall of Timurid empire
- The Russian conquest of the region in the nineteenth century
- The October revolution of 1917 and the secularization of central Asian region (Badan, 2010:91).
Historical development of democracy in Kyrgyzstan

Historically, the Kyrgyz republic was nomads strongly centered on large kinship systems. In the middle Ages, the Kyrgyz were inhabitants of southern Siberia along the upper shore of the great river Yenisei (Engvall, 2011: 12). At times, various Kyrgyz tribes made advances to southwards. For example, in 840, the Kyrgyz advanced into central Mongolia, destroying the Uighur kingdom in the process. In the 13th century, still remaining in Siberia, they were incorporated into the expanding Mongol empire. It was not until the 16th century that the Kyrgyz came to make their presence permanently felt in Central Asia, mainly on the territory of what is present day Kyrgyzstan (Ibid: 13).

However the Kyrgyz were not a unified group. They were divided into different clans, with the family representing the lowest and most immediate level of organization within these organizations. Each nomadic tribe had its tribal chief to regulate judicial and territorial claims with rivaling tribes and settling disputes among his tribesmen. As of the seventeenth century, Kyrgyz tribes were of roughly equal size, and since no one tribe could decisively defeat others and centralize authority, a decentralized balance ensued. As some tribes grew stronger, irregular efforts were made to politically unite the Kyrgyz. The most prominent example is the attempt by the nineteenth century ManapOrmon, of the SaryBagys h tribe in northern Kyrgyzstan, to set himself up as the leader of a confederacy of tribes (Engvall, 2011: 13).

Political System prior to the Tsarist Period

Prior to Russian conquest of Central Asia in the last third of the nineteenth century, the culture and political life of the region did not change much widely from other parts of the Muslim world (Badan, 2001: 22). The earliest people of the region are believed to be a mixed community of Mongol, Turkic, and Kypchak descent (Vaidanath, 1967: 16). The Kyrgyz society was nomadic and tribal in nature. In this period the people lead a migratory life, and food gathering and hunting were their main occupations (Christian, 1998: 48). Due to land locked and infertile country, it was largely separate from outside influence (Ploshikh, 1998: 1). In the early thirteenth century the Kyrgyz people flew towards the south which was captured and ruled by the Mongolian Empire. Diverse Kyrgyz tribes inhabited the area in fifteenth-sixteenth centuries extended from western Mongolia to the eastern Turkestan. However, the Central Tien Shan, the Chui valley and the south-eastern part of Fergana region, i.e. the territory closely connected with the present day borders of the Kyrgyz republic, formed the heart of Kyrgyz nation's territory. Thus, upto1685 the Turkic people ruled this region (Rahul, 1979: 2).

In the 15th-16th centuries, the Kyrgyz people started to settle in present day Kyrgyzstan. In the beginning of 19th century the southern part of the area became under the jurisdiction of the Khanate of Kokand. After the medieval age mainly Central Asia broke down into three native Khanates, i.e. the Khanate of Kokand, Khanate of Khiva and Emirate of Bukara (Badan, 2001: 98). The Khanates were ruled by a group of elite known as Khans and Emirs (Shams-ud-Din, 1992: 22). They were very brutal in nature and used to penalize the native people if they disobey their order. Moreover, they exploited the poor people of the region in making them do inexhaustible work for them. In the Khanate period, the women were the worst victims. The women had neither liberty nor aware to participate in the political process of the society. They were even not permitted to come out of their homes and were impelled to remain in Burka. There were also restrictions on the extent of their social interactions.
The political powers in Khanates were mainly originated and concentrated in few hands of the provincial government known as beks (Badan, 2001: 39). The government was authoritarian and exploitative. The common people had no play in decision-making processes. During this period the clergy was very powerful particularly in the sedentary region. The clergy was the sole interpreter of the Islamic laws for their self-interests and enjoyed high position and respect in the society. During this era the system of administration, taxation and land revenue was completely established on the Perso-Arab system of Transoxiana with heavy levies and punishment including the death penalty (Badan, 2001: 22).

The judicial procedures were divided into two types of courts: 1. courts for the settled population, and 2. courts for the nomadic population. The Kazi was considered the representative of god and main source of all laws and justice for the settled population. Initially the Kazis were appointed for life but with the passage of time the Kaziship acquired a hereditary character (William, 1966: 37). All social, economic or religious disputes were settled by him. Hence Kazis enjoyed a high stature in society and economic privileges. Like the rulers, the Kazis were dictatorial and biased in delivering the justice and their verdicts were normally in favour of the rich and powerful persons of the society. Other religious elite was the Mufti who used to be the exponent of Islamic laws (Sharia). They were the legal and the spiritual heads of the Khanates.

The second type of court was for nomadic people. It was primarily based on the unwritten conventional laws passed on orally from generations to generations. Disputes were settled before a group of esteemed elders called beys (Pierce, 1960: 76-77). All the disputes and offences including murder were settled by paying Kun, a system of payment for release of criminal (Williams, 1966: 12). If a dispute could not be settled or the decision was considered unsatisfactory then it could be put before another group. Unlike in modern society, the punishment was severe. Torture, cutting of hands and feet, burning eyes and ears, and various more or less cruel forms of death penalty were executed (Pierce, 1960: 76).

Thus we can say that the political system in pre-Tsarist Kyrgyzstan was exploitative and deprived in nature. People had no possession of civil liberty and political rights. They could not participate in the political activities of their country and even the government was not subject to criticized. However during the nineteenth century the region came under the Russian empire. The main focus behind the expansion of Russians towards Central Asia were to fulfil their desire of economic interests, to establish new market for their trade, it aspire to conquer India and to resist British expansion towards Central Asia (Pierce, 1960: 1-2). To satisfy all these objectives and to grab Central Asia, the Russians in 1839 started annexation process of the region (Vaidyanath, 1967: 30). In 1865 gradually Tashkent was captured and declared part of Tsarist Russia and Governorship of Turkestan was established. By 1873 the Khanates of Bukara and Khive were consolidated in Tsarist Empire and by 1876 Khanate of Kokand was captured. By 1884 when Merv was captured by the Russian military, the whole region of Central Asia came under the Tsarist Empire (Vaidyanath, 1967: 30).

The educational pattern in the Kyrgyz region during the period was based on traditional Islamic law. Education was hinged on the old religious system and imparted through institutions known as Madrassahsand Maktabs, which were directly affiliated to the mosques. The teaching and instructions in these institutions were religious preaches and the literacy rate was very low approximately 2.4 percent (Shams-ud-Din, 1992: 23).
Political System during Tsarist Period

In the early 19th century Khanates were absolutely powerless and the Russian forces conquered the region (Silverstein, 2002: 96). In order to dominate the area Russian Government pursued a policy of forced resettlement of ethnic Russians. The Russians treated this region more like their colony and less like the territory of Russian Empire. The Russian administration was of military in nature and was run by the Ministry of War (Pierce, 1960: 65). It was headed by Governor General who was responsible to Ministry of War (Badan, 2001: 80).

The Governor-General owed his authority through an office staff consisting of number of secretaries and clerks. The Russian army officers ran the administration and exploited the local people for their own interest (Sharma, 1979: 5). The local people had no inclusive role in the administration and they had no right to criticize the policies of the Tsarist administrators in the region (Ploshikh, 1998: 21). However, at the local level the administration was comprehensively depended on native administrators who were liable over criminal and civil cases.

The Tsarist Government maintained the same types of courts as was prevailed prior to tsarist period. But ironically in this period the powers of Kazi in judicial sphere were constrained. Similarly, the second types of courts were for nomadic people. The system was based on the customary and unwritten laws where disputes were settled before beys as earlier. They had legitimacy over all criminal cases. But during this period the Tsarist Government regenerated the traditional courts and reproduced election system of the judges (Pierce, 1960: 77). Accordingly both Kazis and Beys were elected for three years and received salaries from local tax funds. The main motto of all these rectification was to tighten their hold on this region and smooth run of their administration.

Moreover, in order to lure them, they established a new type of education pattern based on Russian model. It was primarily based on three types of school system. First of all, there were schools for teaching Russian language to the local people. In the second types of schools the Russian administrators taught Russian culture to the local people, so that they could suppress native religion and tightened their hold on local people and thirdly, there were schools for the native Russians who were serving in the region. The Tsarist regime developed the region as their colony (Wheeler, 1964: 69). The main purpose of Russians was its economic and military exploitation to fulfil the basic requirements of the industries of Russia.

The policy of economic exploitation changed the nature and structure of the Central Asian society in totally and the Kyrgyz republic categorically (Vaidyanath, 1967: 50). But some of the striking changes were the outgrowth of native intellectual class, particularly Djididists intellectuals, the establishment of modern means of communication like posts and telegraphs, the creation of new class of industrial workers and moneyed aristocracy etc. However administrative reforms have brought a slight improvement in the women condition and they were not impelled to follow the Islamic rule. The native people literally, did not appreciate these relaxations and approaches.

During the Tsarist period the Kyrgyz native people felt very insecure. Primarily the educational institutions like pre-tsarist era were slanted in favour of Arabic, Turkish and Persian, theology and the laws of Shariat (Sharma, 1979: 20). The Russian administrators even initiated certain modernization process i.e. judicial system, construction of roads and railways, etc. And above all the Russian administration had equalized the burden of taxation.
Political System after October Revolution

Prior to the October Revolution in 1916, the situation in Turkestan and the Steppe Region was conducive to enrich the power of the Bolshevik Red Army to dethrone the Tsarist regime. The inconsistent policies towards Central Asia after the death of Kaufman in 1882 and the unprecedented increase in Russian and Ukrainians settlements in Muslim lands had generated widespread discontentment against Russian rule, which culminated in 1916 revolt (Gheeler, 1964: 97). This revolt in Central Asia was a breakthrough in the history of Kyrgyzstan. Following the turmoil and the help of the Bolshevik, Kyrgyzstan got rid of the autocratic Tsarist reign.

After the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 the Soviet Union was portrayed on the world scenario. Its new Constitution adopted the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) as a socialist state and all powers belonged to the Soviets authority. Additionally small-scale enterprise was permissible in the initial Soviet Constitution and rights of inheritance were 'protected by law'. Moreover, the Soviet Union was completely depended on one party state. The Communist Party was the sole political organization which was allowed in the country and all decisions of the government were taken by the Communist party. In 1924 after the delimitation of the Central Asian republics, Kyrgyzstan identified Kara-Kyrgyz Autonomous Oblast, as a central part of the Soviet Federation. In 1926 it was again acknowledged as the Kyrgyz Autonomous Republic in the domain of the Union of Socialist Republic (USSR). The final Constitution of USSR in 1936 the oblast recognized as the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic with the equal status to other union republics of the Soviet Union (Ploshikh, 1998: 3).

Kyrgyz life was dramatically changed being a part of the largest country of the world. During the Soviet period Bolsheviks tried many times to convert Islam from Central Asia but they could not succeed. Soviet Government formulated many significant step to reform the central Asian states to seem akin as Russia like in 1917 she declared the equality of men and women, and in 1921 declared polygamy and the kalym (bride price) to be illegal (Ploshikh, 1998: 97). During the Soviet period mosques and prayer houses were demolished. In the 1920s Kyrgyzstan walked over the developmental path of cultural, educational, and social life. Literacy rate greatly improved, and a standard literary language was introduced in the region. Economic and social development also was noticeable.

After disapprove Islam indirectly the soviet government started a direct assault. Authorities prohibited zakat (giving of alms) and hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca) and began closing mosques. During Stalin era the government mercilessly dictated the execution of Muslims who had possessed a copy of the gospel of Koran. In order to subdue Islam, the Soviet authorities attempted major enhancement in the academic pattern in Muslim parts of the country. The Soviet leaders were also convinced that improved education would pave many Muslims to recognize the superiority of Marxism over Islam (Sharma, 1979: 18).

Notwithstanding, the oppression of Islam by the Soviet Government the people did not debar from the practice of the Islam. Though it was not done publicly but they practised clandestinely. Salat (daily prayers) could be performed once a day instead of five times. Similarly, the hajj to Mecca was unimaginable and that was replaced by pilgrimages to many local holy places within the Soviet Union. In this period citizens had possessed very minimize political rights. The Communist ideology of political freedom was absolutely separate from the Western perception. Hence, freedom was merely granted under the supervision of Communist Party. In the Constitution the citizens were provided all the fundamental rights like the right to speech, and freedom to street processions and demonstrations (Munro, 1959: 659). The
reformation of Soviet Constitution in 1977 which was almost same as 1936 Soviet Constitution acknowledged for universal suffrage, right to be elected to the public offices and to participate in political party but at the same time posed restriction on the citizens from organising or joining a political party other than Communist Party. Overall the Kyrgyz people were given the freedom to associate under the superintendence of Communist Party.

There was a provision in the soviet period that no person can be arbitrarily arrested and put in jail. Thus, no person shall be arrested except by decision of courts. The Kyrgyz people were also given the right to vote equally as other part of the Soviet Union. In addition to elect Soviets the people were not allowed to take part in nationwide discussion on important issues. Moreover, the Kyrgyz people could take part, as citizens of the Soviet Union, in referendum, which might be held on important national issues. Unlikely tsarist period, the Kyrgyz people were given the rights to criticize the policies of the government and various state organs in the Soviet period. To the extent the Communist party approved and permitted it. The condition of women has progressed widely in the entire soviet period and for the first time in the history of central Asian states that the women have secured the privileged to participate in the political processes of the state. According to Soviet census the number of women in higher education as a percentage of the total has risen from 28 percent in 1927, to 43 percent in 1960, to 49 percent in 1970. There were unprecedented improvements in pre-school care for children - in 1960 there were 500,000 places but by 1971 this had risen to over five million (Sajoo, 2002: 154).

During this period the Kyrgyz society was popularly an orthodox and nomadic society. The society was mainly hinged on the agricultural productivity. The Soviet government introduced new techniques and machines of agriculture such as modern irrigation system and fertilizers to increase the production of cotton. They treated this region more as colony than as their republic. Like the other colonies, the Kyrgyz republic was the main source of primary goods. The Russian masters encouraged the primary sector and Central Asia became the source of the raw materials to the metropolis, such as tobacco, cotton, wheat, vegetables (potatoes, sugar beets, beans), fruits (apples, apricots, peaches, grapes, berries), sheep, goats, cattle, wool, etc. (Sharma, 1979:152).

In March 1985 Gorbachev the liberal communist leader became the General Secretary of the Communist party of the Soviet Union. Gorbachev introduced many radical economic and political reforms after coming to power. At the twenty seventh party congress in 1986 Gorbachev declared that economic reform was “the key to all our problems, Immediate and long term, economic and social, political and ideological, domestic and foreign”(Anan, 1990: 24). The adoption of victorious step Perestroika and Glasnost influenced the political, social, cultural and economic life of the people of Soviet Union (Hill, 1999: 188). This historic introduction of reforms in Kyrgyzstan led to land slide emergence of new political parties, groups and the media and the end of prolonged monopoly of the Communist party. It was seen simultaneously that the Communist party became weak and lost its old aura and potency.

In 1990 after the independence of republic the leadership was shifted to Asker Akaev after the bloody ethnic riots of Osh in Southern Kyrgyzstan. This new government immediately adopted a policy of economic and political reforms. The disintegration of the Soviet Union further gave a boost to the process of democratization in the Kyrgyz republic.
Conclusion

Determined to liberalization of economy and politics, Kyrgyz republic gained independence in 1991. Since independence the state runs in flexible with democratic fuel the pro-western leader Aksor Akayev. But due to intra party rivalry regarding the reforms in state, there was a large chasm between the president and his party men. Being failed to convince them, the democratic card house demolished with the dissolve of the house by the president. This study looks into the trajectory of democratic state to an authoritarian reign. In 1995 constitutional referendum the president augmented his power discriminately. He also justified the authoritarian system is more viable in a multi ethnic and multi lingual society. Similarly he could manage to grab the throne in 2000. But the scenario has dramatically changed in 2005 due to high corruption, family clan politics, land policy and language provisions etc. After dethrone his handpicked successor was Bakiyev. He also followed the same path guided by his predecessor. This condition brought resentment and fury across the state. But by and large the free media, civil society and local governance played a propounding role to bring and maintain stability in the nation.

In the end, it can be said that democratic process in the country has partially flunked to exercise the independent agenda. It has become a model for all the Central Asian states for a certain period of time. Particularly in 1994, when the president raised his power through referendum by breaching the constitution had led to defunct of all the government machineries. It was the real defeat of democracy in a state. Several reforming policies regarding language, land revenue have been adopted which has proved as a loophole in the reform process. Thus, it is a huge setback to the democratic and state-building process in the republic. In view of the above analysis, it can be generalized that the democratic process in Kyrgyzstan needs to be effectively boosted up for escorting the stability of the nation and prosperity of the community. All shades of institution and sector should come under the developmental process. The election commission, political parties, media (print and electronic) and judiciary should function efficiently according to the enshrinement of the constitution. All attempts should work for the privilege and opportunities of the citizens, irrespective of sex. Thus, protecting the overall development and fulfilling the wish of all people should be the real target of a democratic state.

References


