

## **Basic Democracy System and Role of Bureaucracy in Islamic Republic of Pakistan\***

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### **Abstract**

Pakistan inherited the British system of bureaucratic centrality after independence, which shaped and controlled the political, administrative and financial portfolios of newly emerged state. After assuming the power, Ayub Khan introduced the system of Basic Democracies with local councils under the headship of district bureaucracy. This paper is an effort to elaborate the role of bureaucracy in Basic Democracies System of 1959. Paper discusses the functions of local councils under the headship and assistance of bureaucratic officers.

**Key Words:** Basic Democracies, Bureaucracy, Local Government, Supremacy, Grass Root

Local bodies are remarkable due to public participation in local governance. Democratically designated, piloted by local publics; answerable to their local populations. National and sub-national governments have no control over them. Local ruling classes are local establishment that symbolize the democratic idyllic at local level. Local representatives solve the problems of their communities on their behalf. Local governments are integral part of any political system, which constitute local institutions governed by local populace. Local governments are very important in terms of service delivery, public participation, policy designing, domestic law-making and good governance at local level. They are also crucial to depoliticize the local governance mechanisms and to approach the central and provincial institutions.

Bureaucracy is hierarchical organization managing and monitoring the state business. A vibrant hierarchical pattern, specialism, division of work force and formal set of rules and regulations are important specifications of bureaucracy functioning in any part of the world. Bureaucracy establishes the administrative mechanism of local governments to deliver social services, design local policies and form rules and regulations. Apart from enactment and implementation of laws and conveyance of social services, bureaucracy also administers the developmental projects planned by elected representatives of autonomous local

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governments. During ancient times of Indian history, Delhi Sultanate, Mughal period and British regime, central governments used to nominate and appoint officers to administer local governance.

The archaeological sites of Mohenjo-Daro, Harappa and Takhat Bhai in Pakistan reveal the human civilizations of 4000-5000 B.C., which disclose that, throughout prehistoric time periods, the Indus civilization had specific administrative institutions providing municipal services (Devolution Trust for Community Empowerment, 2014). The British government established the Municipality of Madras as the first municipal corporation through a royal charter issued on December 30, 1687 (Chandio, 2015). According to Oxford Handbooks, organizational pattern of bureaucracy in local governments could be traced back from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the 1980s (Ejersbo & Svava, 2012). Portfolios of district magistrate, collector and maintainer of law and order have been vested with the authority of deputy commissioner since the beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> century, which extended to education, health and farming etc. (Inayatullah, 1964). History of modern local self-governments is about 129 years old in South Asia (Bangash, 2011).

Initially, British East India Company promulgated Conservancy Act 1842 in Bengal Presidency and later in Karachi, Lahore and Rawalpindi. Punjab Municipal Act 1873 increased the powers of municipalities to deliver municipal services. District Improvement Act was promulgated in 1864 and Municipalities were established in Punjab under Punjab Municipal Act in 1867. Divisional commissioner was the head of Municipal Committee (Devolution Trust for Community Empowerment, 2014). In 1882, Viceroy Lord Ripon initiated the idea of managing affairs by the Indians themselves at local level (Bangash, 2011). Deputy Commissioner was the raja of district administration at that time, which shaped the district administration as autocracy (Inayatullah, 1964).

Village governments have been traced back during the period of British India (Heijer, 2010). In Punjab, Ministry of local governments was constituted in 1922 (Devolution Trust for Community Empowerment, 2014). Initially, local institutions were given under officials (bureaucracy) but amended towards public participation in 1909, 1919 and 1935 (Bangash, 2011). Central government was authorized to appoint bureaucrats from Indian Civil Service at district level to manage local politics and local governance (Batool, 2014). Government of India Act 1919 gave little space to Indian politicians answerable to legislatures but maintained the authority of central bureaucracy. According to (Inayatullah, 1964) British regime completely rooted out the village administration, panchayat or village councils while introducing bureaucratic led district administration.

After independence in 1947, Pakistan assumed federal structure of governance. Pakistan proved a laboratory of political experiments negating public participation in policy-making and policy-implementation at grass-root, sub-national and national levels. During initial days of independence, the concept of local governments was unknown and experienced additional hurdles in the way of enactment. Pakistan assumed temporarily the Government of India Act 1935, the path finder of Indian independence, as interim constitution. According to Government of India Act 1935, provinces were entitled to legislate the mechanism of local governance. Local Service Act 1947 in Sindh and NWFP Municipal Act 1950 were the initial legislations after independence (Devolution Trust for Community Empowerment, 2014).

A very little number of civil servants was given to Pakistan as share from Indian civil services. Number of bureaucratic officials in local institutions at the time of independence was at bottom (Bangash, 2011) but they succeeded in capturing policy making and implementation in Pakistan. In initial years bureaucratic control over national policies strengthened the office of bureaucracy in Pakistan (Kamran, Democracy and Governance in Pakistan, 2008). Malik Muhammad, Chaudhary Muhammad Ali and Iskandar Mirza were bureaucrats who further reinforced the British oriented and highly centralized bureaucracy (Kamran, Democracy and Governance in Pakistan, 2008). System was lacking mechanism of institutional supremacy and service delivery. Deputy Commissioner (DC) was a sovereign authority in district administration and bureaucratic structure controlled whole of policy-making and revenue collection. Lack of political, administrative and financial devolution is contradicting phenomenon of decentralization in Pakistan.

System of local governments is not deep rooted in Pakistan. Initially, no democratic government upheld the system of local governments in Pakistan. Military regimes always promoted local autonomy based on divide and rule strategy. General Ayub Khan designed local institutions answerable to bureaucratic chiefs under Basic Democracies System (BD) 1959. Democratic governments allegedly failed in setting-up a pure representative structure of local governments, which are almost engineered by military governments. Local representatives and institutions remained always subservient to bureaucracy, which secured its powers while using the institutions of local governments. Policy designers used to debate bureaucratic authority and local self-rule while structuring the local governments and always prioritized the former.

As we have mentioned that Pakistan's bureaucratic structure is inherited from British rule, which was highly centralized in nature. Examination of executive branch and political trends show nature of centrality faltering devolution of

powers at grass root level, which is the sole responsible behind the political instability in Pakistan. In case of devolution, Bureaucracy dislikes the financial and administrative autonomy of local governments. Political engineers drafted different systems of local governments in Pakistan. Incompetency of political authorities, corrupt follies of bureaucracy and military's lust for power never prioritized the institutional supremacy, establishment of local governments and quality of democracy.

Role of National and sub-national governments in the context of local governments is always negative, which behave the local governments as half-bred and want to allocate financial resources to local governments to strengthen their political grip at grass root level. Sometimes they bypass the political institutions and utilize bureaucratic formations as fundamental tool to allocate the budgetary shares to local governments. This political phenomenon makes the bureaucracy a major stakeholder in local governments. Role of bureaucracy has paramount importance in shaping the political dynamics of devolution or decentralization.

During last decades of 19<sup>th</sup> century, local governments gained the status of permanent institutions with deputy commissioner's authority over district administration. Before independence, with vast range of powers he was not answerable to his immediate superiors but to secretary of state. Being a sole member of ruling elite, he was representative of provincial and central governments at district level. Indian people never tried or protested to change the nature of authority vested with the office of deputy commissioner. Authoritarian district administration completely rooted out the historical character of Panchayat or village council. Administration of newly emerged state continued this pattern of district administration after independence (Inayatullah, 1964).

Political and bureaucratic managers of newly born Pakistan adopted the character of pre-independence district administration same as before and shaped the broad nexus of leaders in Pakistan, who belonged to business but no middle class (Zaidi, 2005). The deputy commissioner as the member of civil service of Pakistan was the pillar of district administration equal to member of Indian civil services before the independence. As a controlling authority and head of district machinery he performed heavy responsibilities in government circumferences. General Ayub Khan as Chief Martial Law Administrator pioneered the system of local governments in Pakistan, which was bureaucratic in nature. Upholders of BD system were in favor of specific roles assigned to deputy commissioner while opponents of the system opposed the office at every forum.

Ayub promulgated the system of local governance in the line of Lord Mayo and Lord Ripon (Kamran, 2002). During post-independence and pre-Ayub era, limited mechanism of non-elected local governments run by central bureaucracy was

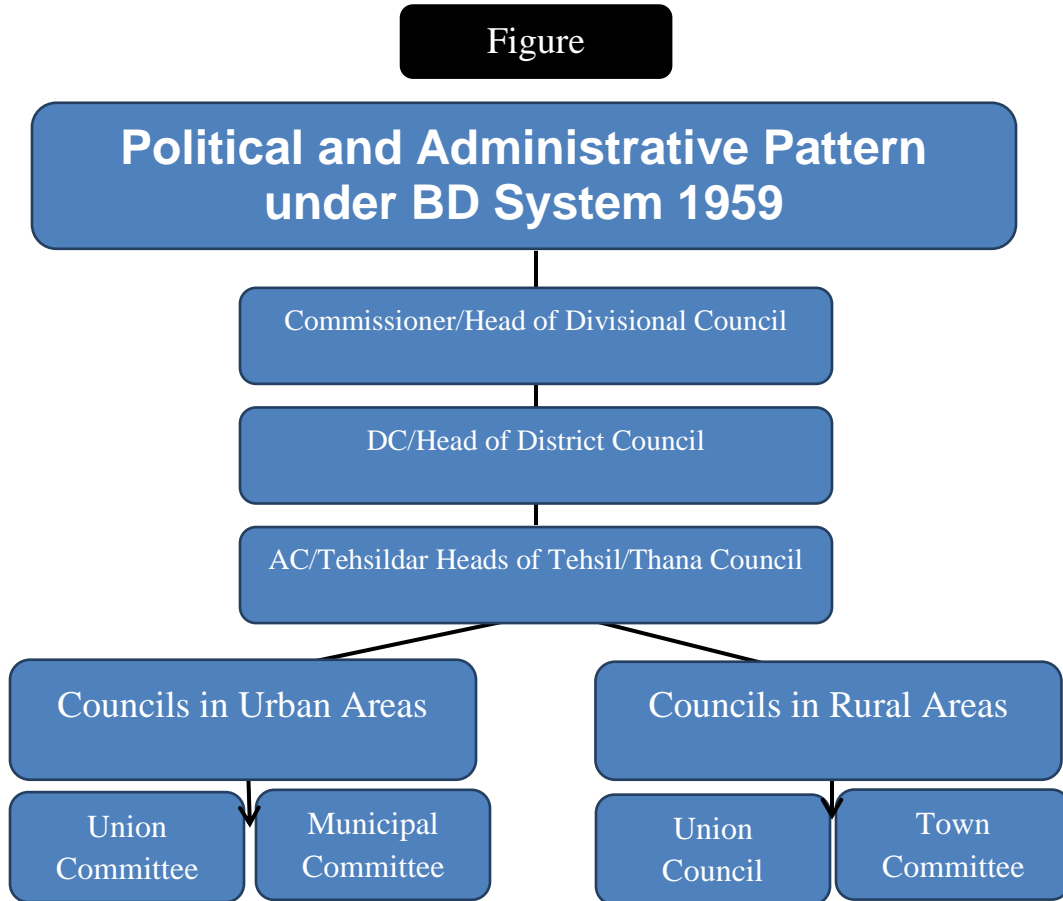
existed (Cheema, Khwaja, & Qadir, 2008). First time in the constitutional history of Pakistan, Ayub Khan pioneered the institution of local governments in Pakistan while promulgating Basic Democracies System 1959. Ayub Khan changed the definition of democracy as “government for the people by the bureaucracy” from “government of the people, for the people and by the people”. Prof. Dr. Razia Mussarat says that, under this system, district administration and elected bodies were given under district bureaucrats to strengthen the Electoral College for future presidential elections. It was an effort to undermine the political competitions by district officials (Musarrat & Azhar, 2012).

BD System 1959 was dominantly bureaucratic in nature. Bureaucracy was given upper hand in decision-making even they had powers to suspend the elected representatives (Batool, 2014). Military-bureaucratic oligarchy was the main framer of that local government system who drafted the controlling officialdom in Pakistan (Zaidi, 2005). Ayub Khan decentralized the political powers to strengthen his central control over federating units. Administrative, political and financial control of district bureaucracy helped to manipulate the local politics (International Crisis Group, 2004). There was no alteration in organizational and functional pattern of bureaucracy. Divisional council was the highest tier followed by district, tehsil and union council. Divisional, district and tehsil level bureaucrats were privileged while elected representatives of councils politically and administratively pathetic.

The BD1959 invigorated and strengthened the significant position of Civil Service of Pakistan (CSPs), whereby the District and the DC turned into the lynchpins of the administration (United Nations Development Programme Pakistan (UNDP), 2014). BD system enhanced the bureaucratic autonomy enormously in the line of British traditions (Batool, 2014). Purpose behind the enactment of BD system was political but not administrative. BD system conferred the portfolio of decision-making in the hands of bureaucracy (Khan, 2014) even that, divisional commissioners were responsible to monitor the activities of elected representatives according to their oath (Gauhar, 1993). Councils under this system were comprised of elected members, nominated district officers, indirectly elected officials and nominated bureaucrats as heads of the councils (Mezzera, Aftab, & Yousaf, 2010).

Commissioners, deputy commissioners and assistant commissioners were assigned lot of powers to administer the local governments. Three tiers divisional, district and tehsil councils were to be headed by commissioners, deputy commissioners (DC) and assistant commissioners (AC) respectively (Khan, 2014). Commissioner and DC were empowered to nominate half of the members of their respective councils (Kamran, Democracy and Governance in Pakistan,

2008). DC was the full-powered controller of financial, managerial and judicial portfolios of district tier. Only union council was under the elected chairman with nominal powers. (Khan, 2014). Organizational pattern of BD system is shown in figure.



Mixture of elected and nominated bureaucratic officials under the leadership of later was the prime feature of BD system. System was comprised of divisional and district councils with financial, political and administrative charges and tenure of five years in both Eastern and Western parts of the country. Tehsil and Thana councils were the tehsil level tiers in Eastern and Western Pakistan respectively. Union and municipal committees were the grass root councils in urban while union councils in rural areas. Councils of BD system were purely based on population i.e. 10,000 for union council (Friedman, 1960). Union committees were not authorized in budgetary allocations. Appointments of members of town committees and the heads of municipal committees and union

committee were carried out by a provincial governments or assistant commissioner/deputy commissioner (Batool, 2014).

The plan was framed to collide the officers and people to work for public welfare (Mellema, 1961). Bureaucracy and elected representatives were expected to perform together but bureaucratic authority remained supreme. Union councils had to rely upon the decisions of controlling authorities of the councils (sub-divisional officers in Eastern part and deputy commissioners in Western part). Controlling authorities had the powers to direct and invalidate the decisions, proceedings, modifications and resolutions taken by councils. Deputy Commissioner was authorized to appoint a person to investigate the unlawful activities of the councils and act in case of failure of union council to take such action (Friedman, 1960).

System of Basic Democracies was purely led by central bureaucrats, which was non-representative in nature. 16 divisional councils were largest coordinating bodies presided by divisional commissioners and 78 district councils were largest administrative bodies headed by deputy commissioners. System was also composed of 630 thana or tehsil councils chaired by sub-division officers and 108 municipal committees headed by bureaucratic officials. 614 union councils, 220 town committees and 888 union committees were also part of structure of Basic Democracies 1965 (Musarrat & Azhar, 2012). Those bodies were composed of elected chairmen of councils, representatives of Cantonment Boards, and various administrative departments of the district appointed by commissioner and deputy commissioner.

Commissioners and deputy commissioners performed various duties under the system of Basic Democracies. Nominations and appointments of official and non-official members of local councils were purely rested with the office of those officers. Functions of coordination and supervision were assigned to divisional council headed by divisional commissioner. Chairmen of district councils, representatives of government departments, cantonment boards and municipal committees composed the body of divisional council. Commissioner was authorized to nominate or appoint the members. Similarly, deputy commissioner was fully authorized to nominate and appoint the official and non-official members of district councils. Assistant commissioners as heads of tehsil councils and sub-division officers as chiefs of thana councils performed several local jobs as well.

Role of district bureaucracy was not confined only to local governance but extended to many other portfolios. A new portfolio 'Village Aid' was created and later renamed as 'National Development Organization' (NDO) headed by a bureaucratic officer 'Chief Administrator' to brought social change and social

welfare in country (Friedman, 1960). Program was suggested by USA and framed by Mr. M. H. Sufi, then deputy-secretary of Ministry of Food and Agriculture, who visited the USA in 1951 (Mellema, 1961). Chief administrator was to be assisted by development officers, deputy directors at district level and regional directors at divisional level. Those officers supervised their concerned areas called as 'development area'. To keep informed the councils about development problems and suggest the development plans was the duty of NDO officers.

Ayub controlled bureaucrats from military and civil services realms counterfeited a durable political association with many middle class urban and rural groups. It helped in increased urbanization and social transformation. But non-participatory and bureaucratic controlled model of governance could not function in the line of political manners and people's wishes. Bureaucracy depoliticized the institutions and isolated the politicians and political parties from governance mechanism. The system reflected the political philosophy of military and officialdom of bureaucracy. General Yahya Khan toppled whole of the system, which erased also the bureaucratic BD. Mr. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto termed BD system that 'it was nothing beyond corruption and nepotism'.

The said system could be termed as Ayubian dictatorship of colonial mind. Developmentalist rule of Ayub was bureaucratic and authoritarian in nature. Democracy had not been experienced in system of Basic Democracies (Zaidi, 2005). BD system was bureaucratic-rule of local governance, which legitimated the supremacy of bureaucracy in power mechanism. Under BD system, bureaucracy reigned the local system of finance, politics and administration as political elite and works as members of presidential electoral college. According to a report of United Nations Development Program (UNDP) bureaucracy particularly (Central Superior Services) CSPs faced immense criticism after downfall of Ayub regime. The nation-wide strikes of 1969 against the dictatorship of Ayub Khan smudged as well the splendor and superiority of the CSPs (UNDP, 2014) from the system of Basic Democracies.

In future, Pakistan could not be escaped from Ayubian mind set and authoritarian wishes of bureaucracy. Aftershocks of B.D system were also experienced in coming plans of local governments. Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto tried to change the system and promulgated People's Local Government Ordinance in 1975 but failed to conduct local bodies elections. General Zia-ul-Haq against the nature of his promises, enforced truly bureaucratic in nature Local Government System of 1979. Under the system of 1979 district bureaucracy was not assigned any specific role in district government but practically local councils and local representatives could not carry out their functions without bureaucratic involvement.





### **Recommendations**

- Supremacy of district bureaucracy over elected councils is beyond the spirit of local government, which should not be practiced.
- Responsibility of Local governance lies with the elected representatives in major countries. Legislation in this regard is need of the hour.
- Bureaucracy ought to be part of bodies like public safety commissions and institutional complaint cells.
- Principally, elected representatives of local councils not be subservient to bureaucratic discipline.

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