



## The Emergence and Development of Local Government System during the Military Eras and the Role of Dominant Biradaris: A Historical Perspective of District Jhang, Pakistan

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### Abstract

Local government system or decentralization of power is one of the fundamental features of the democratic form of government. In Pakistan, the local government system is in its initial stages of development. The current system of local government in Pakistan is mainly emerged and developed during the military eras of different dictators. The military dictators like, Field Martial Muhammad Ayub Khan, General Zia-ul- Haq and General Pervez Musharraf developed local bodies' election for their vested interests. In this study, the data collected through interview of the participants and study of books, articles, etc. shows that civilian governments did very little efforts for the development and progress of local government system in the past. Even the current democratic governments particularly after the fall of Musharraf are also adopting the delaying tactics for holding elections for local government. Some scholars dubbed the democratic governments of Pakistan as 'civilian dictatorship' as these governments were against the decentralization of power. Local government system makes the local institutes strong and resultantly local issues and resources will be managed effectively. Further, the dominant Biradaris of rural areas of Pakistan and especially of rural Punjab contributed significantly in promoting local government system during the military periods. Now the democratic parties are making laws for the better formulation of local government system in Pakistan.

**Keywords:** Local Government, Military, Biradaris, Local Bodies, Dictatorship, Democracy

### 1. Introduction

Decentralization is imagined as one of the fundamental features of strong democratic form of governance across the world generally and in the western nations particularly. Therefore, in local government system span of power is divided at lower level so that decision can be made at local level (Chaudhary, 1988). Moreover, provision of local resources and empowerment of local representatives resolve problems at local level. In this way, the effective management of resources and governance is possible. In the industrialized western developed states, the local government system is working in its real meanings. On the other side, the local government system is not fully established yet in the developing states of South, like Pakistan (Cheema, 2003; Ali & Rehman, 2015). It is an established fact that the existence of local body system particularly in the case of third world countries the presence of local government system or decentralization of power results in socio-economic, politico-financial and educational progress. In democratic governments where local government system is functioning, the subjects can ask questions from their representatives regarding the generation of resources, availability of resources and consumption of resources. In fact, the representatives are held accountable to public for their acts (Haq, 1992).

Although local government system was started just after the independence of Pakistan, yet in real sense the 'Basic Democracy' initiative taken by General Ayub Khan was the stepping stone with respect to the emergence of local government system in Pakistan (Hamid, 1999). It is the irony of fate that local government system has emerged and developed during the era of military dictators instead of democratic regimes. Military dictators with the help of local *Biradaris* developed this system (Chishti, 1989). History shows that a very little effort had been made to enshrine local bodies' system during the civilian governments. Hence, military dictators got double benefits. On the one side, they maintained their dictatorial rule for longer period. On the other side, with the help of regular local bodies or local government elections, they satisfied the local as well as big political clouts (Badar, 1987).

Immediate after the independent of Pakistan there were a lot of problems in Pakistan, like threat of war with India, issue of migrants and an overall unrest and uncertainty occurred because of non conducting of national assembly elections until the year 1970 by the political leadership of Pakistan (Ali, 1967). In such scenario, the idea of establishment of local government system was not more than a mirage. Owing to one or the other reason, the leaders of Pakistan failed in the formation of unanimous constitution for the people of Pakistan and until the year 1949 the state of Pakistan was run under the amended Indian Council Act of 1935 (Musa, 1996).

Lack of cooperation among the political parties due to their vested interests, and lack of vision and political will resulted in absence of general national elections in Pakistan from 1947 to 1970. However, during this period, different elections were held at provincial level, like March 1951's provincial assembly elections of Punjab, December 1951's elections of N. W. F.P. (Now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) and April 1954's provincial assembly elections in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) (Ansari, 2005). But the results of all these elections were not accepted by the majority of the politicians as well as political parties. Majority of the political parties had reservations regarding the entire procedure of elections and suspicious election results, but these elections laid the foundations

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of the national level elections as well as for the local government elections in the following years in Pakistan (Rizvi, 2000).

## 2. Emergence of Local Government System

After the independence of Pakistan, the affairs of this very country were mainly managed and run under the laws and acts given by the British in United India. Before the partition of Sub- continent local government system was also working there. First Municipal Corporation was established By the East India Company in Madras in 1688. Moreover, the Conservancy Act which led to the formation of sanitary committee for garbage disposal was passed in 1842 (Cheema, 2006). Karachi Board of Conservancy was set up in 1846. Similarly, Lahore and Rawalpindi Municipal Act was enacted in 1867. The introduction of Ripon's Resolution of 1882 with respect of local self – government was the main development of local government (Cheema, 2005). This resolution paved the way for some elected members in municipal committees and also recommended the establishments of local governments for rural areas. In the following year, like in 1907 the commission for decentralization suggested the selection of non-official chairman of municipal committee which was also recommended and extended by the Simon Commission in 1927. Therefore, Indian Government Act of 1935 permitted provincial autonomy. It also enabled the provinces to legislate on local bodies' election as well as local government system (Khan, 2006).

Muhammad Muneer, one of the participants of the study said that following the partition of United India, there was no local government system in Pakistan except Punjab where was only a restricted local government system. It did not base on adult franchises. It was also under the strict control of bureaucracy which played a critical role in determining of local government policies. Even the political system at central level was also not strong enough to work properly. In this scenario, it was totally impossible to revive and start the local government system which needed huge funds and planning. Even the national assembly elections were not held until the year 1970. Baxter (1997) evaluated the political history of Pakistan and he said that the era of Pakistan history from 1947 to 1959 with respect to local government system remained in doldrums due to various reasons. The real emergence and development of the local bodies' election or local government system was started by General Muhammad Ayub Khan through his 'Basic Democracy' system.

## 3. Methodology

A mixed method approach is followed in this research paper. Descriptive and qualitative methodologies with historical viewpoints are used in it. The data is collected mostly from secondary sources. Facts and events are reported and elucidated with logic and argument. Although secondary sources are used, yet primary source is also used as some of the concerned stakeholders were interviewed, selected through purposive sampling technique in district Jhang including its 4 sub-divisions. The main contribution and significance of this study is to facilitate the policy makers of Pakistan to understand the role of dominant *Biradaris* in the development and progress of the local government system.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1. The Emergence and Development of Local Government System: An Overview Stepping Stone, 'Basic Democratic System'

The military epoch of General Ayub Khan is considered as the stepping stone with respect to the emergence of local government system in Pakistan. Although, it was General Ayub Khan who introduced local government system in Pakistan for the first time, yet this was also quite different from the subsequent local government systems (Huqqani, 2004). Moreover, Ayub Khan introduced the basic democratic system by which 80000 members were directly elected by the public. 40000 thousands were elected from the West Pakistan and 40000 from the East Pakistan. Basically, basic democratic system was an electoral college for the elections of provincial assemblies, national assemblies and also for presidential elections. Ayub Khan had dual purposes. On the one side he wanted to assuage the grievances of the public through involving them in local government. On the other side he wanted to accumulate all powers to His Majesty by controlling these basic democrats. That is why he became the 'Ghanta Gher' of Faisalabad. In this way, General Ayub Khan continued his national level politics without any disturbance.

Furthermore, Pakistan had witnessed first military government which came into being by imposing Martial Law by General Ayub Khan in 1958. This Military regime lasted till 1969 when another Military man, i.e. Yahya Khan took the control. Although it was a military government; this government also introduced the local government system which had characteristic of democratic form of governance (Ziring, 1971). Abrar Cheema one of the local politicians of Jhang district said that the introduction of local government system by General Ayub Khan on the one hand and the imposition of martial law on the other hand was a clear opposite in the principals of General Ayub Khan. It is because military dictators always hate the democratic norms where power rests with public instead of one man show. Moreover, General Ayub Khan dismissed the national and provincial governments in 1958. He realized that there was a need for at least resemblance of participation of the people in the public affairs (Dobell, 1969). This concern of the Ayub Khan resulted in the rise of Basic Democracies System which provided the concept of local government

system throughout Pakistan. Under the Basic Democracy System, towns committees were set up in urban areas which had population less than 14000 (Alavi, 1972). Furthermore, the Basic Democracy Ordinance of 1959 gave urban areas under the jurisdiction of a municipal body and even some other areas which government announced as urban areas were also given to its. Moreover, almost 37 duties including the promotion of the social welfare and health and the maintenance of infrastructure facilities were given to the Town Committees. Similarly, taxes on 29 different items including trade and vehicles were also levied by them (Khan, 1983).

Although the 80000 basic democrats were assigned the constitutional duties of electing the members of National and provincial assemblies and president, yet they were toothless as they did not have given powers enough to run the local affairs. They only acted when they were permitted by Ayub Khan. Muhammad ... while explaining the truth about the basic democracy of General Ayub Khan explained, "Basic Democracy System of General Ayub Khan which was introduced in the year 1960 was one of the failure plans of military governments which lasted few years like many others plans and policies of General Ayub Khan (Muqem, 1960). It is because during this first martial law period the mainstream political parties were not seen on political platform. There was writ of military bureaucracy everywhere. In this situation, General Ayub Khan had to control the situation and hence he introduced the local government system with the name 'Basic Democracy System', but this system could not return much to the common people of Pakistan. From this system, only the dominant local *Biradaris*' members took the benefits" (Alavi, 1972).

The biggest fault in the basic democracy system was the formation of constituency for every democrat. Constituency was constituted upon 800 to 1000 adults. These adults selected the basic democrat for their constituency. General Ayub Khan assigned the constitutional role to these basic democrats to elect the president, like in the following year their power was enhanced up to selection of National and Provincial Assemblies' members (Hussain, 1993). Muhammad Saleem, one of the participants, said that the basic democrats of General Ayub Khan were in fact the cronies of military government. The military government gave the tickets of basic democrats to their favorite political and non-political personalities. During this period, General Ayub Khan rewarded his many *Biradaris* which supported him during the presidential election in which General Ayub got success.

General Ayub Khan was selected for two times as president under the shadow of basic democratic system. After his success, he gave his legitimate and illegitimate favours to the dominant political clouts, *Biradaris* of Punjab as well as rural areas of Pakistan. The largest number of basic democrats was from Punjab. In this way, General Ayub Khan focused on the local dominant *Biradaris* of Punjab (Hussain, 2010). One of the participants said that it was the Cheemas, Chattas, Wattoos and Jatts of Punjab who selected General Ayub Khan for two times as the president of Pakistan. These *Biradaris* had the largest number of vote bank in Punjab, and therefore Ayub Khan gave the tickets of basic democrats to these *Biradaris* to contest the election of basic democrats.

Anwar Khan, one of the respondents, said that the Basic Democratic system was established on five tiers. Union councils were the lowest but the most important tier among them. Each union council was consisted of having the population of 10,000. They were comprised of 15 members from which 10 members were directly elected by the public and 5 members were appointed by the government. All of them were called Basic Democrats. The responsibility of the Union Councils was to uplift of local agriculture sector, community development and maintenance of law and order situation in rural areas. However, these powers which were assigned to the Basic Democrats were merely for balancing the local elite at local level. But the truth was that the Deputy Commissioner had the real custodian of the power within the district. His influential personality and authoritative behavior usually over-shadowed the power of these local representatives.

Moreover, Tehsil Councils (Sub-division) was the second tier of this local government system. Its functions were coordination among the different branches within the tehsil. District Councils was the third tier of it. Deputy Commissioners presided them. It was consisted of the both nominated officials by the government and the non-officials who were the chairman of union councils (Hussain, 1990). The functions of the district councils were both obligatory and optional which dealt various sectors like education, sanitation, custom, and social welfare. Further, the divisional advisory councils were the fourth tier of it. It synchronized the activities with representatives of government constituent part. Each province had one development advisory council. It was presided over by the governor and selected by the president himself (Hussain, 2004). Both the metropolitan and Union Councils had parallel arrangements. They had to execute similar functions. However, their major function was to play the role of Electoral College to elect the president, the National Assembly, and the provincial assemblies (Jalal, 1995). Likewise elections of national assemblies, provincial assemblies and the presidential elections of 1964 were fought on this ground.

According to Waseem Rajput, lawyer at Jhang district bar, the biggest failure of Basic Democracy system was that it could not strengthen its roots in the society. It did not develop democratic values in the society rather it was orchestrated by a military man to fulfill his dreams to adhere to the governance as long as possible. As it did not have roots in the public, it fell apart with the fall of its creator in 1969. Moreover, this local government did not play positive role for integration among the rural areas. It further hatred and prejudices and hence polarized the rural segment of the society. Even clashes occurred within the family and the biradari. It is because it's primarily purpose

was the economic development alone. It further increased the authority of the bureaucracy, the power of the landholders and the big businesspersons in Pakistan.

The political history of Pakistan is the real witnesses that how the dominant and powerful *Biradaris* of Punjab generally and particularly the district *Jhang*, played their crucial role during the military periods. These *Biradaris* remained significant, played active role and were also helpful for all dictatorial rules. It is because this local system was controlled and engineered democratic form of government. The military dictators did not conduct free, fair, transparent and direct national or provincial elections. They envisaged that controlling of Electoral College members was easier than getting vote from the public. That is why; they remained dependent upon the local bodies' elections. Resultantly, dominant *Biradaris* of especially *Jhang* [Punjab] and generally of all over Pakistan got opportunity to play vital role in the local government elections. Same was the situation during the basic democratic system of General Ayub Khan. He himself created and nominated Electoral College of 80,000 basic democrats which later on nominated him as the president of Pakistan. He succeeded in presidential election of 1965 with 62.64 votes from these basic democracies. He got majority from the rural areas of N.W.F.P (now KPK) and Punjab as compared to his opponent Fatima Jinnah who got majority from the urban areas of Sind and East Pakistan. According to one of the respondents, Malik Muhammad Mumtaz, Sardar Ghulam Muhammad Shah and Qazi Ghulam Shabbir were the famous personality from *Jhang* district who played vital role during the basic democracy of General Ayub Khan. These political personalities contested the national and provincial assembly elections and took oath under the president ship of General Ayub Khan. In fact, General Ayub Khan allowed such dominant *Biradaris* members to take part in the political activities that served his objectives.

#### 4.2. Local Government during General Zia's Era

The military period of General Zia-ul-Haq is also characterized with the contestation of three local bodies' election and one general election though it was non-party elections. Martial law was imposed by Zia Ul Haq on 1979 and also dismissed the civilian government of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto (Arif, 1995). From the year 1979 until 1985 he did not conduct the general elections though he promised that he would hold elections within 90 days when he came into power. Likewise of his predecessors, he focused on the local body system in order to assuage the grievances of the public and to prolong his government. It is the irony of fate that local bodies elections were conducted after every four year i.e. 1979, 1983 and 1987 but general elections at national level were held only once in 1985 and that elections were too on the base of non-party election (Ziring, 1988) To conduct the local government elections remained the policy of all the military dictators right from General Ayub Khan to General Pervez Musharraf. It was the only way through which the military dictators made their close contact with the people and to some extent to the native politicians of every area. In this way, people did not stand against the martial law of the military dictators. The military government systematically entangled people in local government (Burki, 1988). Salman Ahmad, one of the participants, said that conducting the local bodies' elections on time and escaping from the general elections always remained the primary policy of every military dictator. It is because only in this way the military government smoothly runs its government at national level and at local level by engaging people in native and low level politics. It was also protect the military governments from peoples' agitation.

During the democratic period which lasted almost for 7 years from 1970 to 1971, the civilian government of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto paid heed to the local bodies' election like his predecessor General Ayub Khan's basic democracy system which vanished after the fall of his military government (Hussain, 2004). Contrarily, one of the participants said that though Z. A. Bhutto launched civilian government but that democratic government of .Bhutto was in fact commonly known as 'a civilian dictatorship rule'. History of Pakistan shows that all the developments which were made during the local government system were made primarily during the military governments. Some people rightly criticize the democratic governments of Pakistan that they only talk about the establishment of democratic governments but they do not follow the parameters of democratic governments.

When General Zia took power in 1977, he dismissed the legitimate democratic government of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto and also abrogated national as well as provincial assemblies. As he belonged to military so he wanted to suspend the political activities while putting ban on the political parties as he considered them against Islamic values (Hussain, 1994). General Zia- ul-Haq was very close to the religious groups; therefore, he implemented many Islamic laws. Owing to prolong his regime, he introduced new Islamic Laws on one hand and a new political system on the basis of local body system on the other hand (Jehan, 1972). Nevertheless, he feared that elections of national and provincial assemblies might end his rule. Therefore, he delayed the national elections until 1985 and ban lots of political parties and political personalities from taking part in elections as well as in political activities (Korejo, 2004). There were three major motives behind this Zia's approach. Firstly, he wanted to legitimize his martial law. Secondly, he wanted to divide the nation on local, provincial and federal level. Lastly 1973 constitution of Pakistan was abrogated and he intended to entangle the nation in local politics so that nobody can claim about the revival of constitution or former political system (Kukerji, 1985).

One of the participants said that General Zia-ul-Haq's regime was full with interesting facts. He held local bodies' elections on regular basis mean after every four years i.e. in 1979, 1983, 1987 but general elections were held only once in 1985 after 8 years lapsing of time. Although general elections were held in 1985, yet formation of parliament

and government took three years to come into being. It shows the intensions of the military dictators who work to protect and to prolong their military government. Behind their every act there were hidden vested interests. The policy of General Zia-ul-Haq was same as of the British, i.e. to 'divide and rule'. Luckham (1971) explains the military era of General Zia divided the people on local basis and then got the support of the dominant and politically strong *Biradaris* of rural Punjab like his predecessor General Ayub Khan who got success due to support from rural Punjab. In the case of political history of Pakistan, either the political parties or the military dictators who succeeded in getting the support of the *Biradaris* of Punjab, they got success in every national, provincial and local body's elections".

In local government elections, in case of District Jhang, there is much need of support of the politically, socially and financially strong *Biradaris*, such as *Sials*, *Syeds* and *Lalis*. General Zia-ul-Haq systematically gained the support of dominant *Biradaris* of Punjab as well as the influential *Biradaris* of district Jhang during the local bodies' elections which were conducted during his tenure. Moreover, these *Biradaris* also supported General Zia during non-party base election of 1985 (Milliam, 2009). According to one of the participants that all the Dominant political leaders, like *Molana M. Rehmatullah*, *Moulvi Manzoor Ahmad*, *Malik Ghulam Abbas*, *Mehr Zafrullah Khan*, *Aman ullah Khan*, and *Khan M Arif Khan* contested the national as well as provincial assembly elections and got success. These political personalities also had much influence at local level politics, and hence these *Biradaris* played significant role in all three local bodies' elections which took place during Zia's period.

To promote his policies through the local government system, like general elections, General Zia also conducted elections for local government on the bases of non-party elections. It was Zia-Ul-Haq who introduced local government system in 1979 almost after 20 years when General Ayub Khan implemented in 1959 (Hayes, 1986). General Zia-ul-Haq issued almost nine ordinances after implementing this local government system. The local government was constituted by the following way: there were 84 District Councils having 17737 elected councilors, 4100 union councils, 12 municipal corporations, 117 municipal committees, 285 town committees and 39 cantonment boards. All these local bodies were made to develop their local respective areas and make plan for progress (Aziz, 2008). The structure and system of local bodies' election of 1979 was adopted from Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's local government system. In all provinces this local government system was introduced including Islamabad capital territory and independent Kashmir with the name of local government ordinance 1979 (Arif, 2001).

Muhammad Kamran, one of a senior Bureaucrats, said that General Ayub Khan's local government system was center oriented whereas, on the other side the local bodies' system of General Zia-ul-Haq was decentralized in its nature to some extent. The later transferred the powers to the local representatives. The local system was so strong as revenues were collected on time and later on they were spent on the needs of local people. But on the other side, the local government system of Zia-ul-Haq also gave boost to caste system, sectarianism and creed system.

#### **4.3. Devolution of Power Plan 2001**

After General Muhammad Ayub Khan and General Zia-ul-Haq, the important military period which contributed significantly in the emergence of local government system in Pakistan was the military regime of General Pervez Musharraf. Musharraf came with seven-point agenda, such as, regularizing the economy, elimination of corruption, strengthening the local government system etc. (Talbot, 2002). The era of General Pervez Musharraf is considered as the break through development and progress in local government system and greater power devolution from top to bottom level. He also empowered women through greater women participation along with maximum women quotas in every field. General Pervez Musharraf came with Devolution of Power Plan 2001, through which he introduced a modern system of local bodies' election in which prominently he enhanced the number of women seats at local government, and provincial and national assemblies (Qureshi, 2009). In this way, his period is considered as one of the successful periods with regard to the further emergence and development of local government system. Unlike his two predecessors, General Pervez Musharraf came in power with new agendas and innovative thinking. He conducted the national elections in 2002 after the passage of almost three years when he came into power through military coup (Cushing, 2002).

According to one of the participants, General Musharraf adopted different strategies to prolong his military tenure as he held both local body elections and general elections as well. He focused on local bodies' election just after he came into power with the help of Devolution of Power Plan 2001. He also conducted the national level general elections in 2002. In both elections, he got the support of the old electables belonging to different affluent *Biradaris* and got success at both level; i.e. in local bodies' election as well as in general elections of 2002. In this way, Musharraf succeeded to remain in power for almost 9 years.

The objectives of Musharraf's devolution Plan were to build genuine democratic institutions, to strengthen public at lower level while boosting people's involvement in governing affairs and also to ensure the delivery of justice at door steps (Nelson, 2009). Like previous local bodies' elections, these local bodies' elections were also non-party base elections. 18 years of age was recommended for suffrage instead of previous 21. Women were given 50% seats in union councils. Minorities were given the right to elect their candidates through joint electorats. By this way the grievances of the women and minorities were addressed (Iqbal, 2012).

#### 4.4. Future of Local Government in Pakistan

In Pakistan, future of local self governance is bright as majority of the researchers say that the little development made in local bodies' law formulation is a stepping stone towards the strengthening of this system. Moreover, the past two democratic governments in the 21<sup>st</sup> century brought some changes and conducted the local bodies' election. Although, they also adopted the delaying tactics, but still there is hope of improvement in this system. On the other side, the importance of local body system is enhancing gradually among the native politicians as well as among the common people of Pakistan. So, the local government system has a bright future ahead in the coming years.

#### 5. Conclusion

Local government system is the management of the people and resources at local level with the help and guidance of the local representatives. And this system is the fundamental unit [the base] of democratic form of governance/government in the world. In the developing states, like Pakistan, the condition of democratic norms is very poor. An establishment of local government system is one of the basic values of strong democratic government. Unfortunately, the democratic governments did not pay heed to the development and progress of local government system in Pakistan. The democratic-political parties and personalities always talk about the establishment of democratic government. But when they come in power, they become the civilian dictator in their nature. At this point there is no difference between the military dictators and democratic leaders. Whereas, the military dictators are to some extent perform better than the democratic leaders. The military governments of Pakistan which ruled over Pakistan in different periods of history contributed significantly in the emergence and enhancement of local bodies' election or local government system. Right from 'Basic Democratic System' of Ayub Khan to the 'Devolution of Power Plan' of General Pervez Musharraf, the military regimes promoted the democratic values but primarily at local level. At national level or at center the military dictators held all powers among themselves. On the other side, during the episodic democratic periods, such as, from 1947 to 1958, 1971 to 1977, 1988 to 1999, and 2008 to 2013 and onward, the democratic or civilian governments which ruled over Pakistan during these periods worked very small for the development and progress of local body system. The military dictators were abhorred in promotion of democratic values, but they conducted the local bodies' election just to keep people busy at local level, assuage their grievances and to entangle them in local matters. So that, people and politicians do not raise voices against their illegitimate military rules. After the year 2008, although a little development was made in the development and progress of local government system, but still the last two democratic governments have taken few steps for the establishment of local governments in different provinces. Lastly, the role of the dominant *Biradaris* of especially rural Punjab is prominent in the establishment and promotion of local government system. In fact, the emergence of local government systems during the martial regimes was impossible without the support of influential *Biradaris* of Pakistan.

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