

Research Article

**The concept Decentralization – Issues and Perspectives of Local Government in Pakistan**

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**Abstract**

The local government system is mainly designed to serve as an instrument for transferring powers at the grass root level. It has three basic elements as envisaged by its founder's that are the decentralization of different types of administrative authority, the transfer of resources to lowest district and Union council level and most importantly the devolution of political authority and power. The concept of decentralization has been adopted by so many developing countries in the recent past. As they want to put an end to their hydra headed issues and problems they face in their home land. The main aim of this paper is to find out the problems and factor that Pakistan has been faced in process of decentralization. This paper can lead us to learn the lesson to avoid ourselves from and most importantly to develop certain amount of understanding in order to support certain factors and the bridge among the democratic governance and the concept of decentralization which are extremely vital and necessary vital for the smooth functioning of decentralization and also to give quick and rapid public services. This research paper will help us to understand that what are the vital factors that can leads us to the success of decentralization in certain particular context? This research have informed us that all the adopted models don't work for the success of decentralization unless that get fit into the local context.

**Introduction**

Decentralization is the devolution of powers from centre to the federating units. The Centre devolved powers to the units which helps in administration of good governance. The Decentralization has been classified and explained in the four different forms by different authors. The Classification is made in four major groups. It is De-centralization, devolution of powers to semi-autonomous and others semi state agencies. It also includes the transfer of powers to non-governmental institutions from the governmental institutions. (Steiner 2007).

Decentralization is the distribution of powers the central government administrative units. (Rondinelli and Cheema 1983) It is the transfer of powers from the central capital to the units federating units. The center transfer not only powers to the units but also gives the power to legislate on different subjects to

the provinces. It in simple words means the powers are de-centered from the Center to its units. The power scheme is redistributed and schemed is changed from the Centripetal to the centrifugal direction. The center of gravity that was center is transform and the provinces are made empower which is the gist of the process and the idea of decentralization.

The process of De-centralization is also a form of re-distribution of powers from government bodies to the not governmental organization and institution. It also include the transfer of power to legislate to the lower units of government and state. The use of decentralization and devolution and two side of same coins. These terminologies are used for each other and sometimes people misunderstood these phenomenon. These both terminologies are inter related. These are two phenomenon which are self-explanatory rather than two different ideas and perspectives. In this study a brief account of the different perspectives and approaches of the process of decentralization had been reviewed and critically researched in detail. The comprehensive study of the all reforms introduced through local body election made it evident that there were certain factors which are responsible for making the decentralization a weak attempt.

The incompetency of representatives, lack of vision on the part of our political rulers, deficiency of resources, lack of managerial skill and training of the local representatives, coordination among the institutions were responsible for the undermining of the process of decentralization. In other words, it will not be wrong to say that unfortunately our democratic leaders, politician want a democratic process in the country but in reality they also hesitant to share the powers with the common masses which also the main cause that the power does not devolve at the gross root level. The Pakistan case study of local body election reforms is the best example as only four times local body election had been held since partition and first three times the credit goes to military ruler who introduced reforms with vested interest while only for the last time in May 2015 local body election was held under the supervision of a democratic governments but here also the credit goes to the supreme court of Pakistan which thankful take notice and shows judicial activism which made the provincial governments compelled to held the local body elections.

The list of factors responsible for the undermining of the process of decentralization is very lengthy but one main reason is also the lack of interest of common masses owing to the weak financial status and worry of the bread and butter. The people said that there is lack of Political Activism which also cause to undermine the process of decentralization.

The fact is that in a developing countries like Pakistan where the poverty level of people is high and a great number of people live under the poverty lines, in such circumstances expecting political activism is just day dreaming. A person who could not provide his children one time meal how he can take part in political activities like procession, strike, and struggle for rights. He only strive to work day and night in one way or other to provide his family one time meal. He could not afford time for all political activities as if he take part in a political activity like protest he miss the opportunity to provide even one time of meal to his family as he run his family on daily wages. One of the factor which had undermined decentralization is also illiteracy and absence of a vibrant and fully awarded civil society. A civil society which is fully aware of their rights and liabilities will compel his government to make the process of decentralization a reality. In our country the apolitical culture, elitism, the high flooded use of money in elections, and lack of interest of educated and literate people in politics also provides opportunity to the selfish and powers hungry incapable and illiterate people to rule which also one of the reason that powers does not reach to the lower level.

The open civil society is inter-linked with the literacy ratio of a country. Only in a literate nation the idea of open society can be expected. In Pakistan we also face the problem of literacy. Literacy ratio is very low which lead to ignorance of our right and responsibilities. Resultantly we have a passive and un-educated civil society. The role of Civil bureaucracy is also responsible for the hindrance in the full fledged administration of decentralization in the country. A tenure based governments always face it difficult to materialize their agenda and manifesto as a permanent civil bureaucracy create hurdles in the

name of technicalities. The role of civil bureaucracy is instrumental in making the process of decentralization a reality. It's the civil bureaucracy which make the process a difficult jobs. Secondly, there is always civil –military differences which lead which affect the distribution and balance of powers among the institutions. It will not be wrong to say that weak institution and lack of strong co-ordination among the institution internally also responsible for the hampering of the process of decentralization. In addition to all the above mentioned factors tribal culture in our society and the culture of corruption is also one of the main factors which are responsible for the undermining of the process of decentralization. In order to understand the main causes of the undermining the process of decentralization we will made a detail study of all the above mentioned factors one by one.

### **Official Capacity and Managerial Skills Issues in Local Governance:**

It is an evident that the lack of skills and competency to run the local governance system of the local representatives is one of the main cause which is not making the process of decentralization a successful story. The local representatives are new and don't have experience of running a government which affect their performance, functions and service delivery to the public. The local representatives includes workers, peasants, minority, people from the lower fibres of society which are mostly illiterate and simple people and lack competency to run the government which resultantly caused the damaging of the democratic process.

Owing to lack of experience, incompetency and education the local civil bureaucracy exploit their incompetency and fulfil their vested agendas which badly tarnish their image in the general masses and thus raise question over the local government system. According to the (Rondinelli, 1983) it is unfortunate that the Central government is also not interested in the process of decentralization as it does not provides the local governments which capable, competent and efficient personnel's, administration and resources to run a local government efficiently and diligently.

The incompetency, lack of experience, illiteracy and weak skills level of local representatives badly affect their performance and the service delivery system which become responsible for the failure of the process of decentralization. It is necessary that the local representatives must be provided with proper training and their managerial skills and working level must be made enhanced. In this regard The World Bank, United Nations through its agencies, Non-governmental organization and other international organizations can play vital role for the spread of democratic process in the World. (Odendaal, N. 2003).

The World Bank (2004) come up with recommendation that the central government must train the people representatives in a scheme of Top to Down. The local representative's skill and knowledge can be enhanced by conducting workshops and providing training to them by the finance and resources of all the above mentions internationals organizations.

### **Demographic Heterogeneity and Tribal Society:**

There are multiple causes of uprising for demand of their basic rights. The history reveals that in all developing countries the population heterogeneous in nature and there are people of various ethnic and disparity at the social and economic level. There are certain faction of society which are keep pressed by the dominant groups and the marginalized group had no other option but demands rights and for a separate identity. All the separatist moments root cause is the apathy of the dominant groups. Some of the countries succeed in countering the separatist movement and declared them rebels while others situation lead to secession of separatist faction to establishment of new units and states (Zaidi, S.A. 2005)

In Pakistan the fiber of social life is very diverse and people are divided on the base of ethnicity, social and economic divide. The diverse notions of society in Pakistan make the process of decentralization inevitable for the good governance.

The above mentioned notion is also supported by the Smith (1985) and he is of the view that for a diverse society on the basis of ethnic, social, economic divide and a heterogeneous culture make the process of decentralization the need of time. According to Olson (1982) the diversity among the groups lead to separate movements for the social uplifting of their respective groups which pave the way for the decentralization. The diverse nature of society also had strong influence on the support of a candidate in elections.

Every group's voter support their own groups in election, therefore, diversity in social and ethnic level translate into result and support during elections. These social factors also influence the psyches of the voters and candidates. Contrary to the above approach our Pakistanis society is based upon tribal notions. The society is largely tribal in nature and the culture of tribal keep different groups united under a leader and they are unable to go against the order of their leaders. These people are largely are inter woven in the bond of kinship and therefore, they support their Baradari and this system of Baradari and ethnic group also the main cause of damaging the process of decentralization.

The tribal society keep the groups united but at the same time they vote their leader irrespective of the competency of the candidates. In nutshell, the Culture of tribalism and heterogeneous society are the main causes for undermining the process of decentralization.

### **The lack of political awareness and Not So Civil and political Societies:**

It is one of the main reason for damaging the process of decentralization. This problem is commonly face by almost all the developing countries. Pakistan is one of the developing countries and is passing through very critical stage of its political maturity. In Pakistan, the culture of democracy is not permanent and the mind of the people had not fully accepted this system owing to multiple reasons and causes. In our country, we face the gigantic problem of illiteracy which make our performance poor in every walk of life. Our people are mostly low income and could not educate themselves which badly affect their voice for the rights. They owing to lack of education are oblivious even to their fundamental rights which include rights to vote on of the basic right to change the destiny.

In Pakistan due to illiteracy and tribal culture people are mostly not political active and aware. They are not socially active to demand their rights through political struggle and strive. There is a lack of political awareness among the people. There is absence of an active civil society. In World an active civil society is considered as indispensable for the culture of democratic process in the country. A civil society raise voice for their fundamental rights and compelled their rulers to deliver up to mark. A fully educated civil society create awareness among the masses about their basic rights and give them the voice to raise for their rights. It is essential for the decentralization that we have an environment of political awareness and an active civil society which fight and could stand for the fundamental rights. According to the (Hyden et al. 2004) 'Political society', is the place where public demands get tackled by specific political institutions.

A culture of political awareness among the masses, a determined and strong voice for the demand of their basic rights, and presence of an active civil society are the positive sign of a developing and progressing societies in the World. The presence of political environment, political awareness of common masses, and political mind set of general people, an active, strong and determined civil society had a strong and effective influence on the process of decentralization. An independent, strong and vibrant media and nongovernmental organization can play vital role in creating an environment of awareness of political rights and an open well educated civil society. In Pakistan, as Zaidi explains, the concept of people about civil society is very narrow as they are of the view that civil society means the NGOs the non-governmental organization. The approach of people is based on the logic that they only can feel the presence of these non-governmental organization working for their basic rights. They shape their logic on this yard stick which is main reason of their narrow approach towards the idea of civil society. These organization are noticed by the people as working for the flourishing of democracy and raise voice for their rights. People shape an approach that these are the only instrument of change but

these non-governmental organization had an opposite and negative aspect as well. It is observed that members of civil society when get the opportunity they never hesitate to adorn their chest with the slot of ministries and important offices in military regimes. They not only become part of military government but also defend these governments. In Musharraf military rule many active and strong civil society activist join Musharraf cabinet and become part of his team.

### **Inter-institutional Relationships:**

It is not a new concept for the effective process of decentralization. In all the democratic countries the effectiveness and efficient system of service delivery is correlated and associated with the co-operation and co-ordination of institutions. (Ahmed, S. J. 2011) The inter-institutional relationships is deem to be key and instrumental for the process of decentralization. For good governance it is important that decision making process be equally shared among all the institutions. The institutions like Judiciary, Parliament, and Executive must have a strong bond of co-operation and co-ordination because their coordination will make the process of service delivery fast and efficient. These institutions must enjoy equal independence in decision making but with full co-operation and coordination among the institutions. The performance and better service delivery is dependent on the cohesive co-operation and smooth relations of these institutions.

According to (Tendler, 1999) that for improvement of the level of governance healthy competition, race of good governance among provinces, units is a good omen for shining the performance of service delivery.

### **Common Issues in Fiscal Decentralization**

According to (Smith, 1985) in politics we cannot ignore the local finance factor. Local finance play a vital role in the process of decentralization. It is viewed that the fiscal decentralization is key for holding the local representatives responsible. The imposition of taxes and collection of taxes by local representatives will helps in enhancing the quality of governance. The service delivery of the local government will increased. The local representative access to adjust tax rates and extend the tax base will help in making them accountable in the eyes of their voter and they would find it easy to work for the welfare of their support groups as they will not be constrained from financial resources.

The above good governance improvement scheme was also commonly supported by Huther and Shah (1998) after making review of a series of studies and concluding that the fiscal decentralization is instrumental for quality of good governance. It make the local government more responsible, accountable in the eyes of people, improve service delivery, the people are given opportunity to participate actively in the affairs of governance which ultimately had effect on public importance issues.

The generation of revenues by the local government with freedom will lead them to shape their policies of public welfare in an environment of political independence. The experience shows that dependency for finance on Central government badly effect the performance of the local government as the Centre use to exploit the local government and adopt it to delay the process of development at local level. The Central government compel the local government to initiate those developmental projects which suit their vested interests. In essence, Fiscal decentralization significance and effectiveness cannot be overlooked as it play vital role in good governance. (IMF 2004)

### **Localization and Corruption**

There is a view that whether the process of localization lead to increase of corruption or reduction of it at local level. The answer to the question is not as simple as it is a very complex issues. The detail and comprehensive study of facts and figure and ground realities can lead us to a practical answer. Localization in the context means the transfer of power at the gross root level among the local representatives. In other words it is a process of devolution of process at the lower web of society. It

enhanced the base of political activity and provide opportunity to the maximum member of society in the public affairs of society. It's a process of empowerment of the masses at gross root levels. The political awareness of the public is enhanced. Decentralization on the local level creates and introduce multiple association and authorities which has maximum chances of corruption in side these authorities. The establishment of new authorities and corruption index had are directly proportional but contrary to it there is another view shared by (Seabright, 1996 Shah, 2006) according to which the engagement of local representatives increased the accountability of public authorities in the eyes of public which ultimately reduce the corruption and establish an environment of fair dealings. The active participation of the public in public importance affairs keep them in touch with their elected representatives, therefore, the politically aware and educated masses reduce the ratio of corruption. In essence, the detailed study of localization process and a review of facts and figure support the notion that Localization lead to reduction of Corruption as the participation of public in the political affairs and their knowledge about their rights and liabilities make the local representatives accountable in the eye of their voters. In Localization there is a strong bond between the electorate and the candidate, therefore, the close association of voters with their elected representatives helps in election of the most suited and honest candidates which ultimately helps in reduction of corruption. The reduction of corruption also helps in strengthening the roots of democratic process in the society.

### **The Role of Civil Bureaucracy**

In Pakistan the role of Civil Bureaucracy for the process of decentralization is instrumental. A permanent bureaucracy is double edge sword it may be useful as well as destructive for the process of decentralization. It is unfortunate that in our country the track record of the civil bureaucracy is not good. Its role is dubious owing to multiple reasons. A permanent bureaucracy and tenure based government tussle story is not new phenomena. It is a general view that civil bureaucracy creates hurdles and let not the government to materialize their promises they had made with the public. (Jones, 1997)

The Civil bureaucracy enjoys a dominant status as compared to a tenure bases people popularly elected government in Pakistan. The Civil bureaucracy used its experience and skill to dominate the policy of local government and imposed those policy which are promoting their vested interest rather than the welfare of public at large. The policies of local government get overshadowed under the influence of an experience civil bureaucracy. The Civil bureaucracy is the legacy of colonial British rule therefore irrespective of the fact that it enjoy dominance over the government but still its level of performance and service delivery is not up to mark and it is alleged with the red tapping phenomena. Secondly, after patrician different reforms were introduced by different rulers in their respective tenures to enhance the efficiency and performance of this institution but all in vain. The historical study of facts reveals that local government remained under the direct influence of civil bureaucracy and which curtail the pace of progress and social welfare. In nutshell, the role of Civil Bureaucracy in the process of decentralization is instrumental and had a very strong impact. In different times different reforms were introduced by the politically elected governments to bring the civil bureaucracy but still it's a long journey as the influence of civil bureaucracy is very strong and it will takes a long time to reduce the influence of civil bureaucracy over local governments.

### **Lack of education**

Pakistan is one of the developing countries and like all these countries is face with certain common problems. The developing world had a common problem of low literacy level. Pakistan is facing the problem of low literacy level and lack of education badly affect the performance of Pakistan in every walk of life. In spite of all other problems lack of education is also one of the main reason for damaging the process of decentralization. The low literacy ratio make people oblivious to their basic rights. (Memon, G. R. 2007). They damn care about their fundamental and most basic rights. The live a blind life and like a blind don't know the worth of their fundamental rights like right to vote. Their blindness to their fundamental rights like right to vote and take part in political activities become one of the main cause of the hindrance of the process of decentralization. (Hanson, 1997)

Owing to low literacy ratio people least concern about their basic rights to ask their public representatives. The lack of education lead to blindness of mass which ultimately result in hand over power in the hands of power hungry and incompetent people. These power hungry, selfish, self-interest motivated people least bothered about the welfare of public and exploit the ignorance and simplicity of the common people for their vested interests. These people exploit the weakness of the masses in the field of education and use it to build their own empire.

### **Poverty**

In Pakistan the majority of people live beyond the poverty line. Their financial and economic conditions are very weak. They large part of the population of Pakistan find it difficult to earn bread for his family. The poverty level constrain the political interests of people in the political affairs which give the opportunist the opportunity to rule over the helm of affairs. (Hussain, A., & Hussain, 2009). The list of factors responsible for the undermining of the process of decentralization is very lengthy but one main reason is also the lack of interest of common masses owing to the weak financial status and worry of the bread and butter. The people said that there is lack of Political Activism which also cause to undermine the process of decentralization.

The fact is that in a developing countries like Pakistan where the poverty level of people is high and a great number of people live under the poverty lines, in such circumstances expecting political activism is just day dreaming. (Bhatti, A. H., & Malik, M. M. 2001). A person who could not provide his children one time meal how he can take part in political activities like procession, strike, and struggle for rights. He only strive to work day and night in one way or other to provide his family one time meal. He could not afford time for all political activities as if he take part in a political activity like protest he miss the opportunity to provide even one time of meal to his family as he run his family on daily wages.

### **Lack of the Will and Incompetency of Politicians**

The story of decentralization in Pakistan could not implemented in its true spirit because of multiple factors but the historical study reveals that the main factors responsible for undermining the process of decentralization is the lack of the will and incompetency of the Politicians. Since 1947 till now four times local body election has been held and except the recent local body election all the previous three times local body election and reforms were done by the military rulers in their respective regimes (Taha,2012). The Politician who are considered as the guardian of the rights of public and defenders of constitution never seen keen to make the local body election their priority. They always were hesitant to raise voice for making the devolution of powers at the local level. The reason of lack of will on the part of Politician is because of their hesitant attitude to share powers with the local representatives. The Politician of our country had a hegemonic approach and they want to keep all the powers in their hands rather than sharing it for the proper and effective administration. These politician are more selfish and least bother about the public welfare. It is also very unfortunate that in our country money had a very strong influence in democratic process which ultimately create hurdles for the competent poor people to take part in elections and get elected. Most of the educated, competent, deserving and honest people owing to the dirty politics avoid to come into politics which let the door open for the incompetent, selfish, power hungry and corrupt people to take part into election and rule the country. The ruling elite is from these illiterate, corrupt, incompetent and power hungry faction, therefore, they least bother to share power and implement the process of decentralization. In essence, the lack of will and the incompetency of Politicians is the root cause of undermining the process of decentralization. (Dutta-Bergman, M. J. 2005).

### **CONCLUSION**

In essence, the process of Decentralization is the soul of true democratic form of government. It's in true meaning the making of common masses empowered. The Decentralization process made a democratic process stable and strengthened. Its play vital role in the devolution of powers to the gross root level.

Irrespective of all criticism and difference of view the three reforms introduced by the military dictators in their respective regime was instrumental in devolution of powers. In Pakistan, the local governments from 1947 to till now was a great opportunity to make the roots of democratic process deep and strong. The historical perspective and deep study of all the reforms introduced by the military rulers in their respective regimes and the recent experience of local body election in our country is indispensable and vital for the devolution and redistribution of powers on the administrative levels. A historical bird view of all the local governments reforms whether these were introduced before the partition of sub-continent or after partition introduced by the Pakistani governments had one characteristic common. These all reforms were introduced by military rulers in their respective tenure and regimes. The object and purpose of all these reforms was also common as both the British before partition and our military leaders post partition used these reforms to legitimize their unconstitutional governments and obtain the sympathy of the peoples. The local government reforms that has been introduced both in the pre as well as in the post-independence period that these reforms has always been share an important and vital characteristic that these changes has been promulgated by the non-representative governments. It was done by Britain in the pre independence era and in post period this has been done by military government. It is clear like crystal that the devolution process in Pakistan has devolved total 44 subjects, which also include the local government. This thing has been highly appreciated across the country and round about it has increased the efficiency and accountability. In theory devolution seems to be a promising initiative, but reservations persist on its adequacy, particularly in continuing and reinforcing local government as an essential institution of the provincial governments. It is therefore, imperative to review the provision and amendments to the constitution affecting the critical elements of local governance and specially looking at the new distribution of responsibilities under devolution plan 2001 with the potentials and opportunities for better governance.

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