Chapter 12

Challenge of Democracy and Local Governance in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

The chapter is a study of the democratic challenges faced and the local governance structures in Pakistan; how these two are intertwined and influenced by one another. The importance of local government elections and the issue of reinstatement of local government system in the current political scenario has also been the focus of the research. The role of political parties both in the government and in the opposition, in holding the local government elections that is also affecting the mainstream politics up to a significant level. Thus, the resultant situation is definitely affecting the democratic process in the country. The chapter will therefore study this cause and effect phenomenon occurring in the political landscape of Pakistan.

INTRODUCTION

Local governance is key ingredient for any state to carry out its projects and policies effectively and homogenously in its every nook and corner for it generally and essentially provides for peoples’ representatives at the local level. Local governance is generally maintained by the local bodies’ elections. The peoples’ representatives chosen in turn would take the problems and issues from even the smallest of the constituencies to the national and provincial assemblies who would facilitate and solve the issues. The governance at local level is thus, important in many ways. It can best implement the laws and policies of the state as well as minor issues that have the tendency to become greater crisis, may be solved at earlier stage. Moreover, people’s voice can be heard by the central government which is otherwise a difficult task. The roles and responsibilities at local level if taken seriously and appropriately can be very effective means to ensure good governance. The simplest way to control and govern the country is by delegating the authoritative powers to the people’s representatives at local level; the smooth running of affairs can be ensured if all these representatives do their part just in their specific areas in such regards.

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Therefore, the local representation of power is very significant element to smoothly run the affairs of a country; for that purpose, people participation in local level politics is imperative and hence; it should be given importance too. Since people participation in local level politics determines its efficiency and for that reason, it is generally encouraged to increase their participation at the local level.

There are four kinds of Political Culture that indicates the level of political participation of people in a society namely, Parochial Political Culture, Subject Political Culture, Participant Political Culture and Civic Political Culture which indicate orientation of people towards political system; where the people in Pakistan have been placed in the low level of political participation that is, Subject Political Culture. This means that people in Pakistan may be aware of the political situations around them e.g. policy making and its implementation, but may or may not choose to raise their voice against any actions taken by the political figures against their will. Therefore, there is insufficient input from the citizens towards the political system. Whereas, the people in many countries mainly developed countries may opt to file a petition if a government representative takes some actions against their will. Hence, it shows a positive input that gives a positive output in the political system of the country.

Decentralization of power comes with local government. Decentralization is most likely to empower citizens including the historically marginalized groups like women, ethnic, racial, sexual, religious minorities and poor people. (Diamond, 2004) Nevertheless, research and experiences suggest that decentralization is not a solution that would automatically benefit women and men equally.

Research also reveals that gender discrimination and inequalities may be manifested via verbal and physical violence against women representatives, even those belonging to marginalized communities. Local participation in parts where resource management and planning are directed by often shaped by market-oriented policies, prepared at higher levels and connected with growing transfer of the burden of payment and care for families and communities to civil society, predominantly to women; often fortify traditional gender roles and increase women’s unpaid domestic and care giving duties into the public sphere.

Research indicates that political and sectoral decentralization despite taking place concurrently in many places, are usually poorly linked; governance in decentralized sectors often falls short to respond to the needs and rights of local people, which includes women and marginalized people. Sectoral decentralization systems are often closely associated with the privatization of natural resources and services, which gives discriminating pricing systems and user fees having an effect on the most underprivileged people like women. Decentralization has the capability to add to the sustainable development. (International Development Research Center [IDRC], 2008)

Pakistan is a federal parliamentary republic according to its constitution, consisting of four provinces, Punjab, Sind, Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Nevertheless, it is divided into Districts, Tehsils (sub-districts) and Union Councils, having each Union Council comprising a number of villages for administrative use. However, stable distribution of power among the federating units, as well as the local governments, for a commonly acceptable form of the federation remains an elusive objective. There are two factors shaping this situation. First, the political leaders and parties settled on a constitution in 1958 i.e. 11 years after independence, which was later amended twice. Second, the military came to power in the country at several critical junctures and tested with various forms of local government, principally surrogates for a parliamentary form of democracy. (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2014)

Although the 18th Amendment to the Constitution of Pakistan has made revival of the local governments obligatory; it remains to be debated. Article 140(A) of the Constitution of Pakistan explicitly