

MANAGEMENT OF LOCAL AFFAIRS IN COLONIAL INDIA: ANALYSIS OF LOCAL SELF GOVERNMENT

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ABSTRACT

Management of local affairs of a village or town by elected local bodies is called Local Self-government. It refers to those bodies, which are responsible to carry out functions relating to the development of a given area or locality and welfare of its residents. In the term Local Government, the word 'local' signifies a specified local area while 'government' means a system or a mechanism for the purpose of exercising authority. There is a no state, big or small in the world, which is without Local Government. Concept of Local Government includes the right of voters in a specific area to elect their local officers under a broad franchise and regular elections, and through their elected officials to control local affairs, determine local policies, and even to administer some central government's laws according to local wishes and interests. In this paper, an effort has been made to critically examine the functioning of these concepts in colonial India.

Keywords: Local Government, Colonialism, India, Democracy, Management

INTRODUCTION

There are generally two types of government all over the world i.e. the unitary and the federal. In unitary system, all powers are vested in the central government, while in federation; there is a distribution of powers between the federal and provincial governments. In the case of both types of governments, a wide territory is ruled over by a single centre or capital. In other words, the work of government is concentrated in the federal or provincial capitals where all the important decisions are taken respecting legislation and execution of laws. Such is the variety of the work which makes almost impossible for the central and provincial governments to deal with the local problems effectively. To meet such situation, there is a need of decentralization which means the distribution of governmental powers and entrusting them to local organs, which are created in local areas to deal with the problems of local areas. These local organs are known as local self-government.

According to MacIver, state seeks to fulfill three types of functions. Firstly, some functions, which affect the whole community and are of national importance. All such functions must belong to national or central government. Secondly, some functions are of universal character and need efficient fulfillment, thus may be assigned to provincial governments. Thirdly, some functions are of peculiar concern of locality, for example, Omni transport and so on. These services have reference to local needs, and the locality should have direct and complete control over them. The efficient delivery of services, require local experience and knowledge. These services fall within the preview of local-self governments. (Khan, 2009: 3)

MEANING AND IMPORTANCE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

In the term Local Government, the word 'local' signifies a specified local area while 'government' means a system or a mechanism for the purpose of exercising authority. According to Encyclopedia Britannica, 'Local Government means the authority which determines and executes measures with an area inside and smaller than the whole state'. (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1959: 262) Encyclopedia of Social Sciences defines the local government as a public organization authorized to decide and administer a limited range of public policies within a relatively small territory which is a sub-division of a regional or national government. (International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences, 1972: 451) As per Encyclopedia Americana, 'Local Government is a political sub-division of a national government or a sub-division of regional government. It performs functions that vary greatly from one area to another, depending on the existing governmental system and prevailing cultural values. (Encyclopedia Americana, 1829: 637)

The importance of local government has frequently been stressed by English and American leaders and statesmen. Mention may be made of Thomas Jefferson, John Stuart and James (Viscount) Bryce and Alexis de Tocqueville. (Anderson, 1939: xiii) They pictured the local citizens as participating in town meetings and elections, and holding office in their turns, with the sense of public responsibility, ability to cooperate with others, and knowledge of community affairs.

Tremendous enlargement of the scope of governmental functions has given local government a new importance. It would be practically impossible to carry on all of these manifold activities throughout the national territory without the effective cooperation of all the local units of government. Furthermore, the functions of local units, especially in the case of cities, have themselves increased so rapidly that local taxes and expenditures have risen to a position of immense importance in the national economy. Consequently, functioning of local government is being integrated with the central administrative machinery. The thousands of local hands that do so much of the work must be closely articulated with the central brain that makes the plans and gives the orders. (Anderson, 1939: xvi-xvii) De Tocqueville says that the strength of any nation is traced in the local assemblies which are just like primary schools of people teaching and grooming them in the field of meeting their local problems by exercising the local resources and ultimately giving them a satisfaction of self-rule. Spirit of liberty and true freedom cannot be established without setting up the municipal and local institutes. (Malik, 2006: 17)

Shiri G. V. Mavalankar, a former speaker of Indian lower house, Lok Sabha says:

“Our democracy can be truly and firmly led in the development of local self-government. Again it is these institutions which provide training ground for administrators and ministers. The government of provinces and at centre is only an apex of the pyramid which is broad-based on the various local-governing bodies.” (Malik, 2006: 18)

In 1882, Lord Ripon was of the opinion that the political and popular education to people could only be imparted through the institutions of local- self government which provide the people with opportunity to use their intellect and experience to solve their local problems with local means. This results in the establishment of bright course group of civic determined men. (Kahin, 1963: 464) Lord Ripon argues that local government must be viewed as an effective instrument to improve the administration as well as an important source of “political and popular education.” (Tinker, 1954: 44)

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

From a quiet almost dull branch of public administration, local government has developed in recent years into both a matter of major public debate and one of the most vigorous specialism within political science. (Hampton, 1987: 1) The definition of local government implies that it is both local and government. Neither term is simple in its content. First, considerable argument has taken place about the meaning of 'local'. For some people it implies an area consecrated by long history and tradition: the countries and urban settlements that structure our formal spatial awareness. For others, the appropriate locality for local purposes is the socio-economic area governed by journeys to work and the scale needed to provide certain public services. (Hampton, 1987: 2) There is the tricky problem of defining 'government' in the context. Local authorities are not sovereign bodies. That is, they may only act—with certain limited sphere—if they can find positive authority for their actions in a specific law. (Hampton, 1987: 2)

The term 'decentralization' is commonly used to describe the various arrangements of division of powers between various types of governments in the country. There is some dispute amongst scholars about the use of this term. Some (e.g. Maddick, Smith) are of the view that it should be used to describe two distinct sets of arrangements. First, there is 'local government' which involves some sort of locally established assembly (normally termed a 'council') with, usually, elected members. (Maddick, 1963: 23) This crucially, has a substantial element of autonomy from central government, even though it is linked to it in different ways. Secondly, there is 'field administration' which consists of officials appointed by centre but posted to the 'field' (district, province, etc.) to act as central government's representatives. Local government refers to the operations of the corporations, municipalities, district boards and other local bodies. It makes no difference in the nature of local government whether the local area covered by a local body is huge or small and the number of people residing there is large or otherwise. (Wallis, 1991: 122)

The issue of local-level participation in public affairs has emerged as a major theme in development studies over the past fifteen years or so. In this connection, local government may be regarded as one of the crucial channels through which people may participate in decision making within their areas. (Wallis, 1991: 123) The very purpose of establishing local self government is the provision of services to people at their door step by local leadership. Under administrative head, these are responsible for the complete local administration of the district and to help the district bureaucracy in the discharge of their management duties. While politically, these provide a ground to develop and nurture the future leadership for the nation. One thing to be kept in mind, that these governments are not sovereign or quasi sovereign. These are strictly responsible to people who elect them and in case of their failure, the provincial or federal governments can interfere at any time to make them correct.

It is impossible for the central government to look into the details of problems that daily arise in huge areas. Efficiency, therefore, demands that the central government should only mark out general policies and look after general interests and it should leave to provincial and local authorities the formulation of local policies and the supervision of local interests. This means that by the creation of local government not only efficiency is the result, but the burden of central government too, is lightened and it can look to general problems with greater attention and detail. Moreover, problems of various localities differ from place to place. How can one uniform policy, as enunciated by a central government, be of use when necessity demands variety in measures? Hence only local officials can best deal with local problems. If the central government attempts to do it, not only will its officials become overworked, but the needs of

localities will not be met and there would be confusion, neglect, delay, incompetence and inefficiency.

Now, if this work is also thrust upon local officers, they will certainly become over-burdened with work and their superiors will also fail to supervise so many activities of their subordinates. Thus inefficiency will develop and the people will also begin to feel unhappy. To avoid this pressure of work on local government officials, certain powers of administration and organization have been given to the representatives of the people at provincial and central level, so that they may look after the problems of health and hygiene, of light and water supply, of education and of good and scientific housing.

Origin and Evolution of the Local Government System

It was only during the 19th century that the term 'Local Government' was used for the first time. Earlier writers used 'Subordinate Government' to refer to the Local Government and the local machinery for enforcing the laws of the realm. In his book 'Basic Democracy & Local Government in Pakistan', Mr. Masud ul Hasan explains, 'the term Local Government first came to be used in a leading article in the 'Times of London' in the middle of the 19th century and since then it had become part of the political vocabulary.' (Hassan, 1968: 59)

Pre- Colonial India

If we analyze the system of local government before the British period, we trace its origin to the Mansabdari System of Mughuls and Revenue System under Sher Shah Suri. Actually, these two systems were designed to generate revenues for the Mughul Empire. Similar steps were also taken before the Mughals by the rulers of Delhi Sultanate like Allah ud Din Khilji and Muhammad Tughlaq. During period of Mughal Emperor Akbar, the functions of state were clearly divided into administrative and judicial which had helped the delivery of services to the people at their door steps.

Introduction of Local Government in Indian Sub-Continent

The institutions of Local Government have predated the national governments in history. (Sheikh, 2001: 176) Local Government institutions of some kind always existed in the socio-political fabric of the Sub-Continent. The municipal committee and corporations were the creation of the British Rule; the first Municipal Corporation was set up in Madras in 1688. (Rizwi, 1976:2) The East India Company precursor of the British imperial rule established rudimentary local government institutions. The system in the right earnest, however, was brought about towards the end of the last century when political consciousness grew and there were strings of an anti-colonial struggle. (Rizwi, 1976:2)

From the time of British East India Company till 1864, the system of rural local government in India exhibited a tendency to expand district administrative authority and to dilute the old Panchayat jurisdictions. (Rizwi, 1980:2) Municipal administration, however under the British rule was not the continuation or modification of a pro-existent structure but a totally new creation. Born of financial existences which the central government had to face in the mid-nineteenth century, it served first as an efficient instrument of relief to the imperial finances and later as an agency for providing relief to the District Officer from some of the details of his work. It seems; therefore, appropriate to examine the growth of local government institutions in India under urban and rural situations with special reference to areas that now constitute Pakistan.

Stages of the Growth of Local Government during Colonial Era

This may be divided into following four periods:

The Formative Period :	Pre 1882
Period of Transition :	1882-1919
Period of Reforms :	1919-1935
Period of Inactivity :	1935-onwards

The Formative Period: Pre 1882

Prior to the British arrival in India, the people of Indo-Pakistan were aware of a system under which local affairs were managed and a semblance of local government did exist. With a system of administrative coherent with local traditions, the Indian villages had their own government and political life. As Metoalfe, has observed, 'Whatever the strains and stresses of the political life of the country of the age-old socio-administrative structure, traditional corporate life remained undisturbed.' (Rizwi, 1980:2) They were organized in village panchayats – administrative self-government inside the government. The local bodies developed as energetic branches of the village community and performed developmental, administrative and judicial functions: if not purely in the western democratic sense, the villagers managed their affairs in their own way.

Period of Transition : 1882-1919

The second stage commenced with the introduction of Lord Ripon's Resolution of 18 May, 1882. (Rizwi, 1980:15) He took the decisive step by placing Local Government on its accurate basis, not merely as a means of devolution of authority in administration and in decentralisation of financial resources but as a means of 'popular and political education by which alone progressive communities cope with increasing problems of government.' (Rizwi, 1980:15) Actually, such steps taken by Lord Ripon were meant for administering local areas by local people on one hand, and creating interest in local people about local affairs on the other hand.

Lord Ripon was of the opinion that knowledge about local interest would improve local administration. One of the major reasons behind the slow growth of local government institutes in India was the well planned and directed interference on the part of government. The chief reason why local institutions in the past had failed was that they were 'over-ridden and practically crushed by direct, though well meant official interference'. (Rizwi, 1980:15) The principle according to which local bodies would be generally constituted, was stated as follow, 'While maintaining and extending, as far as practicable, the plan of Municipal Government in the cities and towns of each province, the Local Government will also maintain and extend throughout the country, in every district, where intelligent non-official agency can be found, a network of local boards, to be charged with definite funds.' The area of jurisdiction allotted to each Board was to be such as would ensure local knowledge and local interest and the taluge was recommended as suitable unit.

The Taluge Boards were to be combined under a District Board. In urban and rural boards, preponderance of non-official numbers was advocated. The principle of allocation was to be followed wherever practicable, to be supplemented by the system of nomination. Under the principle of allocation, the number of official members was to be determined while under the principle of nomination, the elected/nominated political personalities were to include in the subject boards. The Chairmen of Boards were to be non-officials elected by the members of the Board. The Government was voted with power of control over local bodies, but the powers

were not to be used 'indiscreetly'. With these general principles, Ripon left the details to be worked out locally. This normally meant the provincial governments but in practice, the district officials of the Indian Civil Service.

Period of Reforms: 1919-1935

The traditional years for the British rule ended with the outbreak of World War-I in 1914, when over one million Indian soldiers joined Allied Armies and one hundred million in pounds standing, were subscribed by India in war fund. The Nationalist leaders in the meantime started agitation demanding independence. This led the British Government to reconsider the recommendations of Royal Commission upon Decentralization (1907-1909) and the Government of India's resolution of 28 April, 1915. On the 20 August, 1917, a policy decision was made by His Majesty's Government which provided for increasing association of Indians in all branches of administration and gradual development of local government leading to progressive realisation of responsible government in India. Commenting on the decision in 1917, the Viceroy Lord Chelmsford said:

"There were three roads along which an advance should be made towards the goal indicated in the secretary of state's pronouncement..of these the first road was in the domain of local self-government, the village or rural board and the town or municipal council. The domain of urban and rural self-government was the great training ground from which political progress and a sense of responsibility have taken a start and it was felt that the time had come to quicken the advance, to accelerate the rate of progress and thus stimulate the sense of responsibility in the average citizen and to enlarge his experience." (Rizwi, 1980:33)

Accordingly, the Government of India through a comprehensive resolution enunciated the principle that local affairs should be controlled by local people for which the latter are to be imparted proper training. As per the recommendations of Royal Commission for Decentralization and Government of India's Resolution of 1915, a considerable chosen majority were included in both municipal and rural boards. Moreover chairmen of local bodies were elected though, where still necessary, they were to be appointed out of non-officials. Franchise rules were liberalized and nominations were retained only for giving representation to minorities. Panchayats should were integrated with District Boards. (Rizwi, 1980:33) In the light of these recommendations and a number of new acts regarding urban and rural Local government were passed and old acts amended to suit them to the changed conditions. Since, the departments of local government were now put under the elected Indian ministers of the provinces; this afforded them full opportunities to work up the experiment.

Period of Inactivity : 1935-onwards

World War II dramatically changed the course of events. The period of reform came to an abrupt end. In majority of the Indian provinces, Congress ministries resigned in protest against India's involvement in war without her consent. The provincial legislatures were consequently dissolved and Governor's rule was promulgated in almost all the provinces. The general political condition further deteriorated because of wide spread communal riots throughout India. The diversity was reflected both at local as well as national level. Says Professor Rush Brook Williams:

"A Hindu-Muslim feeling has clogged the whole machinery of local government. The community to which the chairman does not happen to belong devotes all its energies to the task of obstruction" (Rizwi, 1980:40)

At the time of the departure of British in 1947, local government in Indo-Pak Sub-Continent was in a bad state of neglect. Particularly, the areas which constituted Pakistan had no progressive system of local government. Only 47 municipalities, 15 District Boards and 3600 Union Boards came over to East Bengal to provide civic amenities to a population of over 50 million people. In West Punjab, there were 63 Municipal committees, 15 District Boards, 22 Notified Area Committees, 42 Town Committees and 3,544 village panchayats. (Rizwi, 1980:41) In the Sub-Continent, the British introduced the limited representative democracy step by step starting from the Punjab Municipal Act introduced in 1867. Initially, the members were totally nominated but later on various legislations had also permitted the elected members on limited scale. The Act of 1935 further ensured autonomy to the Indians to handle their affairs. The Municipal Corporation for Lahore was established in 1941 under the legislation done by the British. In this way, the local government got its progress slowly and gradually. At the time of independence, the area that constituted the present Pakistan was having no established system of local government except that of Punjab. In the districts, the Deputy Commissioner was the in charge of district that used to exercise legislative, administrative, judicial and financial powers and was not responsible to the people.

CONCLUSION

Although Local Government institutions existed in the Indian subcontinent in the shape of Panchayat, yet they were not very effective. British colonial administration introduced a system of local government either to involve the local people in the affairs of the state and pacify public pressure for democratization but ultimate power remained in the hands of official administrators, who were not in favor of the nourishment of the Local Government institutions as they did not want to see raising of local leadership, which might create problems for them and their existence might be in danger. Lord Rippon tried to make these institutions living but he could not succeed in his endeavor. Moreover, the Hindu-Muslim conflict also did not provide favorable atmosphere for the nourishment of these institutions.

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