

**RESEARCH PAPER****Qualitative Analysis of Local Government Elections 2001: A Case Study of District Peshawar****Dr. Salman Anwar**

Associate Professor, Higher Education Department, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

Corresponding Author

salmandaudzai79@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The aim and objective of this paper is to analyse local government elections 2001 in district Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Local government is a very significant tier of governance in democratic societies. It manages the affairs of government at grass root level i.e. villages, towns, tehsils and districts. Pakistan inherited a more controlled and centralized local government system from British India after its inception in 1947. Unfortunately this important tier of governance did not developed with the passage of time in Pakistan. The devolution of power plan 2001 was an important step taken by General Pervez Musharraf. Reforms were introduced in civil bureaucracy and police and local bodies were strengthened. The study is based on qualitative method with Interviews, personal observations and common masses perceptions about the local government system in Pakistan. Results shows a power struggle between MNA's, MPA's and Nazims after the general elections in 2002. Bureaucracy with their colonial mindset succeeded in getting their powers back with the help of first tier of government.

Keywords: Local Government, Union Councils, District Nazim, Development, Bureaucracy, Police, Power Struggle

Introduction

Local government system is an integral component of democratic societies. It is a third or fourth tier of governance in most of the developed countries. The representatives of local bodies are elected directly by the people at grass root level. The basic aim and objective of this system is to facilitate the masses at their door step. Pakistan inherited the local government system from British India. (Ahmad, et. al., 2015; Rafique, et. al., 2023). Before independence the local government system was more restricted and controlled. The slow process of constitutional development and parliamentary power struggle led the country to a martial law in 1958. In the absence of old parliamentarians the military ruler General Ayub Khan introduced a new system of local government popularly known as "Basic Democracy" or BD system in 1959 (Khan & Rehman, 2022). About 80000 BD members were elected by adult franchise, 40000 each from East and West Pakistan. It not only provided new local representative to the people but also served as Electoral College for President, Provincial legislatures and National Assembly. The BD system worked till 1970 General Elections. After the fall of Dhaka the 1973 constitution provided a provision of new local government system but unfortunately no elections were held during the period of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (Khaliq, 2012). Again after the imposition of third martial law in 1977 General Zia-ul-Haq instead of conducting general elections introduced new local government system in 1979 (Mahmood, 2023). It is pertinent to mention here that until 2001 the local government elections were held under the patronage of military rulers. The reason behind this was absence of main stream political leadership, introducing new leadership and legitimacy of governance before the masses and international community. General Pervez Musharraf introduced a more viable system of local government in the name of "Devolution of power plan 2001" (Rafique, et. al., 2023a; Batool, 2014). In this plan he emphasized on reforms in administration, power structure, management functions and resource allocation. This paper attempts to analyze the reforms introduced in local government system and the power struggle between the local government representatives, provincial legislatures and

bureaucracy. The study is limited to local government elections in 2001 in District Peshawar. The results show a desolate picture of power tussle between the parliamentarians and local bodies' representatives. Although the people were somewhat satisfied with the performance of local representatives but that was the time when elections for provincial assemblies were not held. So it clearly depicts a picture of power struggle and intervention in their respective domain. The paper also presents the structure of local government during 2001 and achievements of local government representatives in district Peshawar in 2001. In the end recommendations are provided for policy making regarding strengthening of local government system.

Literature Review

Khan and Rehman, (2022) in their article "Role of Local Government in Community Empowerment and Participation: A Case Study of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (2001-2018)" argue that local government is an important tier of governance but it has been neglected and given no importance as it deserves. They further stated that Ayub Khan basic democracy and Zia-ul-Haq local government system were also a full of flaws and not aligned with the spirit of empowering the people at local level. They emphasized that Pervez Musharraf's devolution of power plan was somehow an attempt towards empower the local representatives but it also failed due to power struggle.

Tehseen, (2021) in her research paper titled "The role of local government system in South Asia: A case study of Pakistan" stated that the concept of local government system was initiated in South Asia by the British after their annexation of Punjab and Sindh. She further argue that after independence most of the local government elections were held under the military regimes. The researcher only narrated the history of local government in Pakistan. She did not analyse the role and significance of local government which was the basic requirement and theme of the said article.

Fakhar, et.al, (2023) in their paper titled "Historical Analysis of Local Government System in Pakistan: Special focus on Punjab" argue that local government holds great importance in providing basic facilities to common masses. They emphasized on ethnic diversity, efficiency and functions of local government in Punjab. The important section of their research paper was key milestones and challenges but they wrote less on it. This is the key area of research which we have explored in this paper focusing district Peshawar.

Zaidi, & Khalid, (2022) in their research paper titled "Exploring the Derailing Factors of Local Governments in Pakistan: Structural Issues in Musharraf's Devolution of Power Plan" argued in detail about the history of local government in Pakistan and analyzed the factors responsible for the derailment of the most effective local government system introduced by Pervez Musharraf in 2001. They rightly mentioned the structural flaws, power tussle, flawed objectives, flawed bureaucratic reforms and gender discrimination in local government system.

Abbas, et.al. (2022) in their article titled "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" argue that the military rulers introduced the local government system for their own governance issues and interest. They further argue that the local Biradaris or big families' setup played effective role in promoting local government system during these regimes. The researchers laid emphasis on the historical perspective rather than analyzing the role of Biradaris, which would be more beneficial for the readers to get insight into this very significant subject.

Khaliq, (2012) in his article titled "Local Government System in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. A Historical Analysis" stated that Pakistan experienced three local government systems until 2001. He like the other writers and researchers also laid great

emphasis on the historical perspective rather than analytical. In the end of his paper he gave some information of about the performance of tehsil monitoring authorities of District Swat, Dir and Buner, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Ali, (2024) in his research paper titled "Local Government System as An instrument for Authoritarian Governments in Pakistan" argues that the inhabitants of indo-pak sub-continent experience a variety of local government systems. He also started with historical perspective i.e. British India colonial era and then the three local government systems introduced during 1959, 1979 and 2001. His main argument is that local government system was used as a tool for authoritarian rule in Pakistan.

Batool, (2014) in her article titled "Electoral System in Local Governments: A Case Study of Pakistan" stated that the people of Pakistan saw a visible change during the local government system introduced by Pervez Musharraf in 2001. She further argues that though he introduces reforms in administrative structure but there were many flaws in it. However she emphasized on the continuity of local government system and reforms in administrative structure for smooth running of the affairs of governance.

Material and Methods

The methodology adopted for this research is qualitative. Data was collected from research papers, reports, personal observations and interviews with local bodies elected representatives of 2001 local government elections in District Peshawar. It ratifies an in-depth investigation to explore and analyze The Local Government Elections in 2001: A Case Study of district Peshawar. Focus group discussions were conducted with common masses in different union councils of district Peshawar, in order to get first-hand information and opinion about the performance of their local representatives.

Results and Discussion

The Kargil fiasco in 1999 led the then Prime Minister of Pakistan, Muhammad Nawaz Sharif to remove General Pervez Musharraf from the post of Chief of Army Staff. This decision was not welcomed by the core commanders and they showed solidarity and full support to their Commander in Chief (Jabeen, 2019). In a bloodless coup the military took over the charge of government and the National and Provincial Assemblies were dissolved on October 12, 1999. Pervez Musharraf in his first speech to the nation pledged that he would make sure accountability across the board and would reconstruct national confidence in institutions (Ali, 2024). He started his accountability campaign from top to bottom. Many politicians from main stream political parties were either arrested or they left the country in self-exile. In order to fill the vacuum of political leaders he floated the idea of "Devolution of Power Plan 2001".

Devolution of Power Plan 2001

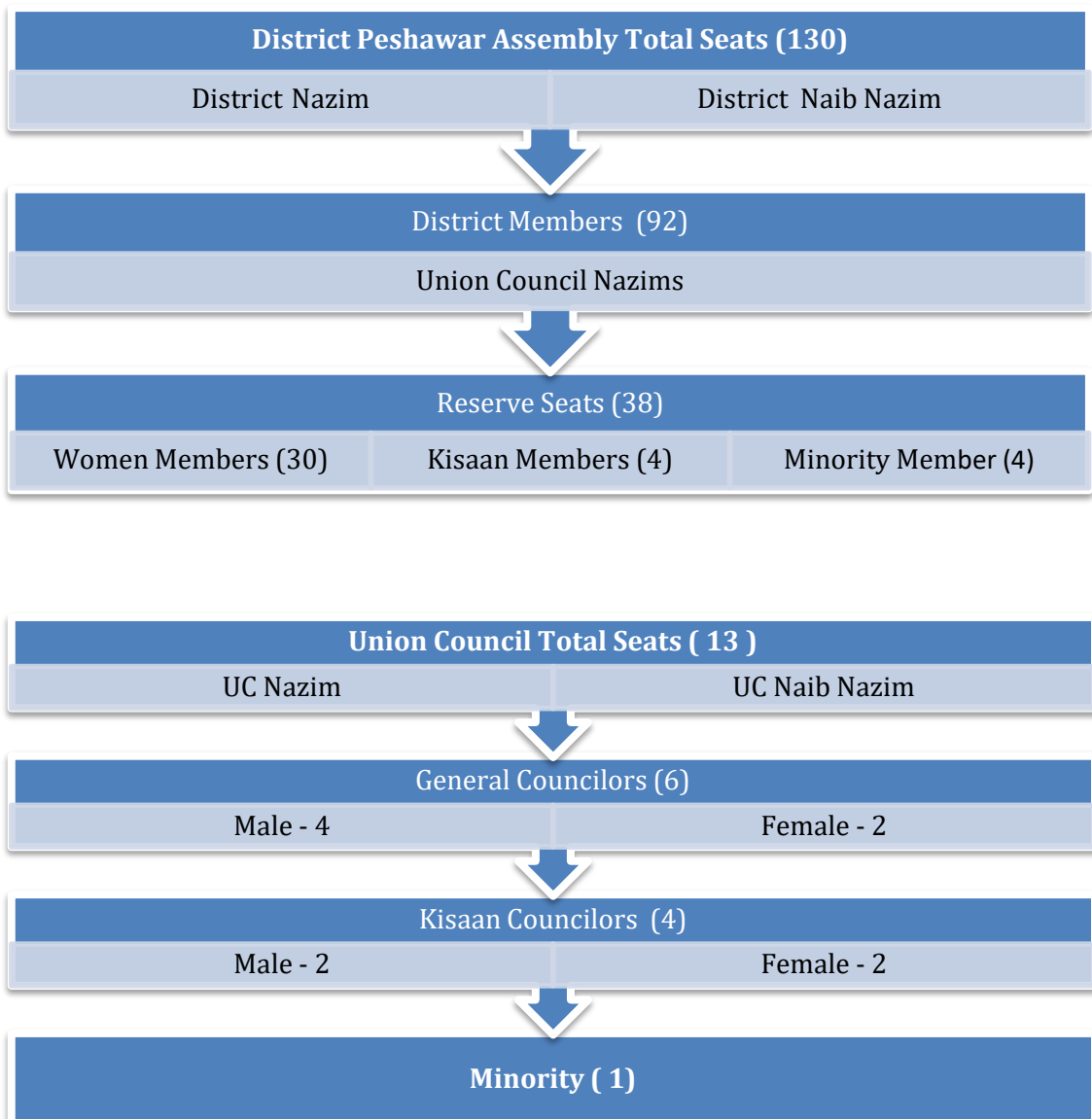
The basic aim and objective of devolution of power plan was to materialize his slogan of accountability across the board and transfer administrative and financial power to local bodies' representatives. It is pertinent to mention here that before the 18th amendment local government was not a provincial subject and it was under the authority of federal government (Khan, 2016). Many analysts are of the view that it actually strengthened the military rule of Pervez Musharraf because immediately after the elections of local government 2001, he conducted a referendum to legitimize his government. Following are the salient features of his famous devolution of power plan 2001.

- Devolution of Political Power
- Decentralization of Administrative Authority
- De-Concentration of Management functions

- Distribution of power/authority nexus
- Distribution of resources

Structure of Local Government in 2001

Under the devolution plan structure of local government was comprised of three tiers i.e. Union Council, Tehsil/Town Council and District Council. Members of Union Councils were elected directly by adult franchise. The Nazim and Naib Nazim of Union Councils were also the members of District and Tehsil council respectively. District and Tehsil Nazim were elected indirectly by the members of Union Councils. District Nazim was given much authority under the devolution plan 2001. He was the executive head of the District Administration. The portfolio of Deputy Commissioner was changed to Deputy Co-ordination officer (DCO) (Cheema et.al, 2005). District Nazim was given much authority under the new system. District Administration and District police officer were made responsible to him, their annual evaluation reports were also counter signed by him. District Nazim was empowered to ensure implementation of the functions decentralized to the district government under the new ordinance (Zaidi & Khalid, 2022). The powers and authority of local government was extended to Finance, Planning and development, Education, Agriculture, Health, Revenue, community development and works and services.



Results of LG Elections 2001 in District Peshawar

In July 2001, elections for Union Councils Nazims, Naib Nazims and Councilors were held on the basis of adult franchise. Peshawar was divided into 92 Union Councils and 4 Town/Tehsil Councils. People from all walks of life very enthusiastically participated. The reason behind people participation was simple and it can be observed in every election of local government. The family or Biradaris affiliation plays an important role in a big turnout on the polling day (Abbas et.al, 2022). The polling was mostly held in peaceful manner despite of hot weather and peoples struggle to pass their candidates. After the direct election of union councils another important step was to elect the District Nazim and Town/Tehsil Nazims. As a result of indirect election in 92 Union Councils for District Nazim Peshawar Azam Khan Afridi of Pakistan People Party became the District Nazim while Dr. Iqbal Khalil of Jamaat Islami as District Naib Nazim and Speaker/ convener of District Assembly Peshawar. The Town/Tehsil council elections results are as follows.

Table 1
District and town Nazims of Peshawar in 2001

Portfolios	Name	Political Affiliation
District Nazim Peshawar	Azam Khan Afridi	Pakistan People's Party
Town Nazim (1)	Haroon Bilour	Awami National Party
Town Nazim (2)	Mumtaz Khan	Awami National Party
Town Nazim (3)	Yaseen Khan Khalil	Pakistan People's Party
Town Nazim (4)	Niaz Muhammad	Jamaat Islami

Source: Local Government, Elections & Rural Development Department, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

The Power Struggle/Tussle between Nazims and MPA's

The local government elections in 2001 were held in the absence of Parliament. General Elections for the Parliament and Provincial Assemblies were held in October 2002. As the leadership of two main streams political parties i.e. PPP and PMLN were not contesting the elections a new scenario emerged in the parliament as well as in the provinces (Tehseen, 2021). In the National Assembly, Punjab and Sindh PMLQ came into power in the leadership of Chaudhary Shujaat Hussain. While in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan Muttahida Majlis Amal (MMA), a combine platform of 6 religious political parties under the leadership of Qazi Hussain Ahmad (Jamaat Islami) and Maulana Fazlur Rahman (JUI-F) came into power (Rauf & Ayaz, 2011). Most of the Union Council Nazims and the District and Town Nazims in their interviews showed resentment in their working relationship with Member of Provincial Assemblies. They said that everything was going in right direction before the general election but now the newly elected MPA's are interfering and creating hurdles in our projects. The analysis reveals that members of provincial legislatures considered these local government representatives as their rivals and they openly debated on this issue with an argument that if we give them free hands how would we face the people in next elections (Fakhar et.al, 2023). Apart from politicians the civil bureaucracy and police also created hurdles for the newly elected local government representatives. Pervez Musharraf for the first time introduced reforms in District Administration and Police. They were not ready for this sudden change thus failed to create a smooth liaison with District Nazims and Union Council Nazims. Resultantly the local government system was lingered on between bureaucracy and provincial legislature. The common masses were somewhat satisfied with the new local government system because their trivial issues were easily addressed at their doorstep.

Achievements of Local Government District Peshawar from 2001-2005

The newly elected local government representatives were very enthusiastic to work for the development of their capital city Peshawar. The first financial year was smoothly passed with power tussle but after the General Elections of 2002 a tug of war between district government and Provincial government started. Despite these political skirmishes and bureaucratic hurdles they worked hard and gained some achievements which are still on record and remembered by the people.

Education

The city district government rightly assessed the need of new colleges for girls. For this purpose first step was taken by the district Nazim, Azam Khan Afridi. He inaugurated a new college for girls in the old building of Municipal Corporation Peshawar. In the very first year of its establishment, 600 students got admission in the City District Girls College Peshawar. It is now one of the leading female colleges in Peshawar. After the successful establishment of City College for Girls another new college for girls was established in the town two rural area of Peshawar. Mumtaz Khan Nazim town two inaugurated a first girl's degree college in his jurisdiction known as Government Girls Degree College Nahaqi (Khan, 2024). Haroon Bilour Nazim town 1 also established two girls' degree colleges i.e. Government Girls Degree College Dabgari and Government Girls Degree College Nothia Peshawar. Government Girls Degree College Hayat Abad and Municipal Inter College for Girls Shahi Bagh were upgraded by the city district government. New busses were provided to every College for pick and drop facilitation.

Health

The District government Peshawar established Maulvi Ameer Shah Hospital Hospital for Women and Children right in front of the City District Girls College in Hashtnagri area. For this purpose they utilized the old building of Government transport services (GTS). This is the only public sector Women Hospital in Peshawar until now. Apart from this district Nazim inaugurated burn centers in Lady Reading Hospital and Hayat Abad Medical Complex Peshawar (Khalil, 2024). Basic Health Units (BHU's) in rural areas were upgraded.

Roads and public health

District Peshawar is the capital of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa with a massive population influx from every corner of the district. In order to tackle the traffic problems the city district government inaugurated the widening and up gradation of two main lines i.e. Warsak road and Charsadda road Peshawar. Although the projects were completed later on but the vision and idea was floated by Local government representatives. Tube wells were dig out in every union council to provide clean water facility to citizens.

Beautification and Sanitation

City district government gave much attention to sanitation and beautification of the city. Street lights, foot paths, waste bins were installed. A new family park was established known as Chacha Younas Park which is still providing entertainment facility to the families and children's of Peshawar. Zakat Committees were established to provide financial assistance to poor families in every union council.

Conclusion

Local government is an important tier of governance. It plays a role of a nursery for nurturing political leadership in a society. During the time of British India despite a limited and controlled local government system a strong political leadership emerged, who played an important role in the independence movement. After independence whether it was a basic democracy of Ayub Khan or local government system of Zia-ul-Haq, it provided

leadership for the future parliaments in the country. The devolution of power plan of Pervez Musharraf was very significant in such a way that he for the first time in the history of Pakistan introduced reforms in civil bureaucracy and police. Empowered the district Nazim with financial and developmental authority and made bureaucracy answerable to him. There is no second opinion on power tussle between the local government representatives and member of provincial/national assemblies (MPA's/MNA's). They consider them as their political rivals and could not manage the voter behavior in general elections. Despite all the odds and bitter relationship with first and second tier of government, Local government played their role well in their limited resources. There is a dire need of structural changes and financial allocation for local government system to facilitate the masses at their doorstep.

Recommendations

Here are some policy recommendations for improving local government system in Pakistan.

- In order to strengthen the LG system clear working mechanism should be adopted.
- No intervention in each other domain (LG & MP)
- Coordination commission for resolving the issues
- Reforms in Police, Bureaucracy and Judicial system are a must for devolution of power to grass root level.

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