

Devolution of Power in Pakistan: A Critical Appraisal of Musharraf Regime

Shafique Ahmed Khan*
Syed Faisal Hyder Shah**

ABSTRACT

Local governments are an efficient method of administering public services, as through it political leadership is drawn from the local populace who has knowledge of and commitment towards the local area and its people. Having a fair amount of power and resources, the local authorities can take initiatives and experiment new ideas to bring positive changes in the lives of the masses at grassroots level. In this way, they can innovate and pioneer latest services and methods of administration which then, can be shared with other authorities. Furthermore, local governments encourage democracy and promote political inclusion in its widest sense, involving people in decision-making process.

Introduction

Since its inception, Pakistan inherited a local bodies system which was only a slight departure from the colonial period as far as the nature of exercise of powers was concerned. A very little attention was paid to the much needed development of

* Teaching Assistant, Department of History, University of Sindh, Jamshoro.

** Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work, University of Sindh, Jamshoro.

local bodies and uplift of the people. Other than General Ayub Khan's "Basic Democracy" and General Zia ul Haq's "Local Bodies System", General Pervez Musharraf introduced the "Devolution of Power Plan" in August 2000. The stated aim of the plan was to strengthen democracy and empower people at the grassroots level. The plan was a major attempt at decentralization accompanied by a comprehensive package of electoral reforms, local government structures and changes to bureaucracy at the district level. The present paper critically evaluates the efficacy and functional performance of local bodies system during Musharraf regime while briefly discussing the rationale behind its introduction. Furthermore, it also discusses the reasons of the failure of this system after the transfer of power from a military regime to democratically elected government. The paper concludes that the system was a good initiative but certain administrative lacunae in its planning and implementation did not allow the system to thrive and achieve the desired results.

Background of Local Governments in Pakistan

Since its inception, Pakistan inherited a highly centralized system of governance. Like all colonizers, the British had devised this system to pursue their imperialistic agenda.¹ A persistent struggle of the people of sub-continent made them to surrender some of their powers in the form of Government of India Act, 1935. The Act envisaged a federal parliamentary system of government for India. After setting up parliamentary governments in the provinces, responsible to their respective legislatures, the British intentionally refrained from setting up the same at the central level. So, the real power remained with the viceroy who ruled the country with a powerful bureaucracy that was free from the parliamentary limitations. The provincial governors were directly answerable to the viceroy. Under the governor, each province had a Chief Secretary and an Inspector General of Police. The Board of Revenue and the secretaries of provincial departments used to report to the

1 Tanvir Hussain Naqvi, "A Look at the Bureaucracy under the Raj", in *The Evolution of the Devolution* (Lahore: Mashal Books, 2007).

Chief Secretary. As the prime interest of the British was optimization of land revenue, they created the post of deputy collector at the district level. His job was to deal with land related matters under the Revenue Act. Besides, the administration of criminal justice was also his responsibility under the Criminal Procedure Code. He was the deputy collector-cum-magistrate. In the absence of any political officers, the colonial institution of executive magistracy also performed political functions at the district level.

Following the partition of the subcontinent, this imperialistic system of administration was carried on in Pakistan. The institution of local government could not make any advancement owing to a highly centralized administrative set-up. This situation led to numerous far-reaching consequences. The chief among them was the growing disillusionment of the people with the government.² They had to go either to Islamabad or the provincial capitals for their petty matters. The people sitting there had no idea about the ground realities prevalent in the far-flung areas. So, the result often was the formation of such policies which ran contrary to the interests of the people.

The first major attempt at introducing local government reforms was made by General Ayub Khan after assuming political power in October 1958. He presented his Basic Democracies Scheme in November 1959.³ The rationale given by him was that the parliamentary democracy was not suitable for Pakistan and it should not be forced upon people from above.⁴ Instead, people should elect their representatives locally who would then constitute an electoral college that would elect the chief executive.⁵ Consequently, 80,000 directly elected Basic Democrats (40,000 from each

2 Tanvir Hussain Naqvi, "People's Ultimate Release from Naukar-shahi," *The News*, February 16, 2005.

3 Saeed Shafqat, *Civil Military Relations in Pakistan: From Zulfikar Ali Bhutto to Benazir Bhutto* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), 39-40.

4 Hamid Khan, *The Constitutional and Political History of Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2002), 219.

5 Khan, *The Constitutional and Political History of Pakistan*.

wing of the country) constituted the lowest level of a tiered system of decision-making. The lowest unit was the union council, each comprising of ten directly elected members and five appointed members. These councils were responsible for local community development and maintenance of law and order. The next level consisted of sub-district, the district, and the division. It was, thus, a pyramid with the union councils at the bottom and the divisional councils at the top. In 1960, the elected Basic Democrats voted to confirm Ayub Khan as president of the country.

The Basic Democracies Scheme was initiated to address the problems of governance by establishing a third tier of government but the scheme was half baked. The political parties were intentionally excluded from the process which gave rise to the notion that the scheme was mainly introduced to secure regime legitimacy by undermining the democratic political parties through patronization of a newly elected class of local politicians.⁶ According to the International Crisis Group (ICG) Asia Report, half of the members of the local councils were officially nominated rather than being elected. The report also says that the councils were virtually controlled by the district administrative bureaucracy who had the powers to suspend the bills passed by these councils.⁷ Thus, the system of Basic Democracy was partially bureaucratic and partially political “to secure the mandate of Ayub”.⁸

After Ayub Khan, the civilian government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto did not establish local governments during its tenure from 1971 to 1977. The local governments were revived during the military rule of General Zia ul Haq. Their revival reinforced the impression that local governments were a tool in the hands of military dictators to create a political base.⁹ Zia promulgated

6 Syed Shabir Hussain, *Ayub, Bhutto and Zia: How They Fell Victim to Their Own Plans* (Lahore: Sang e Meel Publications, 2010), 268.

7 ICG, *Devolution in Pakistan: Reform or Regression?* (Islamabad: International Crisis Group, March 22, 2004), 3-4.

8 Hussain, *Ayub, Bhutto and Zia*, 272.

9 Aqil Shah, *The Army and Democracy: Military Politics in Pakistan* (London: Harvard University Press, 2014), 197-199.

the Local Government Ordinance (LGO) in 1979. The elections were held in September on non-party basis. Zia believed that the political parties were divisive and against the supposedly consensus based political traditions of Islam.¹⁰ According to the LGO 1979, the local governments comprised three tiers in rural areas including union councils, tehsil councils and district councils. In urban areas, the local governments were established at four levels including town committees, municipal committees, municipal corporations and the metropolitan corporations. The local councils were responsible for small scale public welfare and development activities in their jurisdictions. Similar to the Ayub's BD Scheme, Zia's local councils were not entrusted with law and order or policing and these were retained by civilian bureaucrats. Thus, Zia's local governments did little to abolish the prevalent *status-quo*. In post-Zia period, the local government system was dissolved first in NWFP and later in Sindh and Punjab.

Devolution of Power during Musharraf Regime

General Pervez Musharraf came to power in October 1999 by overthrowing the elected government of Nawaz Sharif. Primarily driven by the need to legitimize the *coup*, he gave a seven-point agenda including 'across-the-board accountability; revival of the economy and the devolution of power to the people' to establish democracy at the grassroots level.¹¹ His rationale behind the introduction of this agenda was the reconstruction of Pakistani society which had been torn apart due to the imprudent and ill-advised policies of the civilian rulers.¹² He founded a National Reconstruction Bureau (NRB) headed by Lieutenant-General (retd.) Tanvir Hussain Naqvi. The Bureau was entrusted with the task of restructuring the political and service structures through devolution of

10 Hussain, *Ayub, Bhutto and Zia*, 273.

11 Shah, *The Army and Democracy*, 186-187.

12 Pervez Musharraf, *In the Line of Fire* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 164-167.

powers. The bureau came up with the “Local Government Plan” in July 2000.¹³

Distinctive Features of the Devolution Plan 2000

The Devolution Plan was designed on five fundamentals known as the “5Ds”. These included:

- Devolution of political power
- Devolution of administrative authority
- Decentralization of management functions
- Diffusion of power-authority nexus
- Distribution of resources to the district level

The plan envisaged a three-tier system of governance with district (*zila*) government at the top, *tehsil* municipal administration in the middle and *union* administration at the bottom. The most important feature of the plan was the administrative and fiscal decentralization. Previously, the executive and revenue functions were controlled by the District Management Group (DMG). The commissioners and deputy commissioners virtually controlled the district administration. The plan proposed the establishment of a new administrative structure according to which the head of the district government was an indirectly elected mayor (*nazim*). The district assembly known as ‘Zila Council’ comprised chairmen of all *union* councils in a district. The task of the council was to approve by-laws, taxes, developmental plans and budgets. The district administration comprised 12 departments each headed by an Executive District Officer (EDO). For the coordination of these departments, a District Coordination Department was established headed by a District Coordination Officer (DCO). The office of the DCO replaced the old office of deputy commissioner. The legal and magisterial powers were exercised by the District and Sessions Judges while the police oversight powers were given to the *nazims*. Thus, the plan gave unprecedented administrative powers to the elected officials for the first time

13 National Reconstruction Bureau, *Local Government Plan* (Islamabad: 2000).

in the history of the country.¹⁴ The district administration and police were made accountable to the elected *zila nazims*.¹⁵ In this way, the century old system of subordinating elected politicians to bureaucrats was reversed.

For the monitoring of district administrative departments, the plan proposed special Union Council committees and the Citizen's Community Boards which reached down to the village level. The most important of these committees were the Public Safety and Justice Committees.

For the fiscal decentralization, the plan envisaged that the local governments would receive revenue through the formula-based provincial transfers. Before the introduction of the plan, Pakistan had a highly centralized fiscal system with federal government raising almost 90 percent of the taxes. The provincial governments received federal transfers which comprised 80 percent of their revenues. The plan proposed the establishment of a Provincial Finance Commission for provincial transfers to local governments. The plan also gave district and tehsil councils authority to levy specified taxes.¹⁶

The devolution plan encouraged increased popular participation through reservation of seats for previously marginalized groups.¹⁷ One third of the seats in the *union*, *tehsil* and *zila* councils were reserved for women. Moreover, five percent of the seats in each of these councils were reserved for workers and minorities. Franchise was expanded by reducing the voting age from 21 to 18.

The Devolution Plan was accompanied by a comprehensive package of electoral reforms. The academic qualifications of a secondary school certificate was made mandatory for contesting elections for the office of *nazim* and *naib nazims* in

14 Tanvir Hussain Naqvi, "Devolution the Saviour" in *The Evolution of Devolution* (Lahore: Mashal Books, 2007).

15 Naqvi, "Devolution the Saviour".

16 *Local Government Plan*.

17 *Local Government Plan*.

order to create 'an educated and well informed leadership.'¹⁸ The plan proposed indirect elections whereby *nazims* and *naib nazims* were chosen by directly elected union councilors.

The announcement of the Devolution Plan received mixed reaction. Some criticized it, while others supported it. The mainstream political parties criticized it on the ground that it was only aimed at regime legitimization instead of establishing grassroots democracy.¹⁹ They also argued that the plan was envisaged to gain international support in the name of 'restoration of democracy.' The ethno-regional groups in Balochistan, NWFP and Sindh also opposed the plan.²⁰ They were of the view that local governments were a provincial matter but Musharraf's scheme delegated powers directly from centre to the district level by overruling the provinces. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan rejected the plan on the plea that "its main aim was to depoliticize the governance and to earn a lease of life for the government behind a sort of democratic facade".²¹ On the other hand, the plan did receive appreciation and it was hoped that it would benefit the common man by bridging the gulf between the elite and the masses. The international community which was earlier discontented with the military *coup* warmly welcomed the devolution plan and hoped that it would pave way for the establishment of genuine democracy in Pakistan. In lieu of the plan, the international donors started providing economic assistance to the government for its proper implementation and also to alleviate poverty.²²

Implementing the Devolution Plan: Formation of Local Governments (2001)

The Devolution Plan paved the way for the establishment of local governments at district and sub district levels after a

18 *Local Government Plan*.

19 ICG, *Devolution in Pakistan: Reform or Regression?* 10.

20 "PONAM Opposes District Government Plan," *Dawn*, August 29, 2000.

21 "HRCP Rejects Devolution Plan of CE," *Dawn*, March 25, 2004.

22 ICG, *Devolution in Pakistan: Reform or Regression?* 21.

series of local bodies elections held on non-party basis. Musharraf stated that the non-partisan nature of these elections would discourage political rivalries at district level.²³ The non-partisan nature of the elections was severely criticized by political parties and human rights organizations who expressed their apprehensions that it would exacerbate ethnic, caste and tribal divisions by undermining the organizational coherence of political parties.²⁴

Direct elections were held in five phases for the members of union councils during 2000-01. On the basis of these direct elections, indirect elections were held in July 2001 for district *nazims*, *naib nazims* and *tehsil nazims*. The elected local governments came into effect on August 14, 2001 in 97 provincial districts and four city districts of Karachi, Lahore, Peshawar and Quetta. The establishment and working of these governments was a positive mechanism of public administration in Pakistan.

Efficacy and Functional Performance of Local Governments

With the installation of local governments, it was expected that this new system would inculcate a fresh breed of local leaders and improve governance by empowering people. But the outcome had been mixed and somewhat chaotic.²⁵

The formation of local governments did bring some change in the political and social landscape at the district level. Almost 150,000 new persons were brought in the political arena as a result of the creation of more than 6,000 councils which was indeed an exceptional socio-political transformation.²⁶ According to an estimate, almost 38 percent of the newly elected councilors came from the families which did not have

23 Zafar Abbas, "Musharraf Unveils Local Election Plan", *BBC News Online*, August 14, 2000 <news.bbc.co.uk>

24 Iffat Idris, "Will Local Government System Survive?" In *The Evolution of Devolution* (Lahore: Mashal Books, 2007).

25 Sajid Mansoor Qaisarani, "District Set-up too Slow to Deliver," *Dawn*, March 16, 2002.

26 Sarwar Bari, "Devolution and Civil Society," *The News*, July 16, 2004.

any political history of electoral contests.²⁷ The women and minorities also contested elections on their reserved seats and became a part of political process whereby they could raise issues of their respective communities.

Despite this socio-political transformation, the performance of local governments was not much satisfactory since the beginning and situation worsened after the elections to the National and Provincial assemblies were held in 2002. Instead of cooperating with each other, the *nazims* and the members of national as well as provincial assemblies started disappointing each other. Before the establishment of local government system, the members of national and provincial assemblies used to carry out the developmental work in their respective constituencies besides giving time to their duties as legislatures. Moreover, the DMG, owing to its concentration of land revenue, magisterial and police supervisory powers, was an important instrument through which these members of assemblies exercised power in their constituencies.²⁸ Now that the responsibility of development had been entrusted upon the local governments, the legislatures were dissatisfied at the loss of their previous influence over developmental projects in their constituencies. They started viewing the elected local officials as their competitors.²⁹ Moreover, many of the district *nazims* did not have political affiliations with the ruling provincial coalitions. They often made complaints that provincial government interfered in their local affairs and even transferred the district staff without their authorization. In June 2003, 24 *nazims* from NWFP gave their resignations over undue interference of the provincial government of Mutihida Majlis e Amal (MMA) in

27 Shahrukh Rafi Khan, "The Devolution Plan," *Sustainable Development Policy Institute* 8, No. 2 (February 2002).

28 Ilhan Niaz, *The Culture of Power and Governance of Pakistan 1947-2008* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2010), 124.

29 Sultan Mahmood, Sarfaraz Ahmed and Hashim Khan, "Management of Local Government in Pakistan: An Analysis of Musharraf Era", *Asian Journal of Management Sciences and Education* 5, no. 3 (July 2016): 110.

their local affairs.³⁰ The *nazims* of tehsil and union councils also resigned in solidarity with the district *nazims*. Such tensions between the local and provincial governments adversely affected the process of governance at the local level.

The tensions between the local and provincial governments were also due to another factor i.e., the Local Government Plan was prepared by the NRB whereas the provincial governments were not involved in its preparation. In federalism, the powers are devolved from centre to the provinces which in turn delegate these powers to the local governments but this was not the case with the devolution scheme of Musharraf regime. The Local Government Ordinance 2001 was formulated by the federal government but all the four provinces were ordered to notify it as their own law.³¹ In this way, the devolution plan failed to recognize the federal character of governance in the country where the provinces are fundamental constitutional units of governance and local institutions are creations of the provincial governments.

Another factor which affected the proper functioning of local government system was the ambiguity regarding the Local Government Ordinance 2001. The LGO was open to various interpretations.³² There were no clear lines of authority to delineate the relationship between *nazims* and the DCOs. The LGO targeted the powerful District Management Group by abolishing the office of the Deputy Commissioner and distributing its functions into different offices. According to the LGO, the district *nazim* was the head of the district government assisted by the DCO. The DCO was required to seek the permission of the district *nazim* before referring important policy matters to the provincial government but in practice, the *nazims* were often bypassed by the DCOs since there was no provision in the LGO that would ensure the

30 *The News*, June 2, 2002.

31 Kunwar Idrees, "From Politicians to the People," *Dawn*, August 3, 2003.

32 ICG, *Devolution in Pakistan: Reform or Regression?* 13.

former's compliance with local government directives.³³ It is an admitted fact that a newly established system cannot be perfect from day one. Despite its internal pitfalls, it is supposed to fight with the forces wishing to revert it back to the old order. The bureaucracy was unwilling to work under the public representatives and there was a lack of coordination between the two which inauspiciously affected the functional performance of the local governments.³⁴

The local governments also lacked a comprehensive check and balance system. The monitoring committees that were formed to keep a check on the *nazims* and the administration exist 'mostly on paper' and could not play their role effectively.³⁵ The proposed office of district ombudsman could not be formed which was supposed to give relief to the people against government abuses. Consequently, there was increase in corruption. Also, the administration of various departments like health, education and social services became highly politicized with the *nazims* and councilors appointing people of their own choice.³⁶ This atmosphere of corruption and nepotism proved disastrous for the local governance.

An effective system of governance and administration requires a good deal of planning. An in-depth analysis of the devolution scheme shows that it was implemented in haste without proper planning. Under the scheme, the district bureaucracy was replaced by *nazims* and councilors who were not much qualified. The former deputy commissioners used to be the civil servants selected on merit and trained vigorously for years. Ironically, the prescribed qualification of district *nazim* was just a matriculation degree. Furthermore,

33 ICG, *Devolution in Pakistan: Reform or Regression?* 13.

34 Mohammed Zakir Abbasi and Razia Mussarat, "Devolution of Powers to Local Governments in Pakistan during Musharraf Regime," *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences* 35, no. 2 (2015): 898.

35 Shahrukh Rafi Khan, Foqia Sadiq Khan and Aasim Sajjad Akhtar, *Initiating Devolution for Service Delivery in Pakistan: Ignoring the Power Structure* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2007), 202.

36 Niaz, *The Culture of Power*, 126.

they did not have administrative training. They were inexperienced and could not understand the complexities of the system. Their administrative inexperience did not allow them to perform their professional duties in an appropriate manner which added to the ineffective functioning of the local governments. Instead of making a hasty implementation of the devolution plan, the government should have given them proper training in management courses in order to make them work quite effectively in the field of administration.

The lack of planning in the devolution scheme was also evident from the fact that land reforms were not introduced which was vital to its success. Without land reforms, the administration primarily remained in the hands of the elite landlords.³⁷ Thus, power could not be devolved to the common man in true sense. Though fresh candidates contested elections, yet majority of the candidates belonged to the political families who had a history of electoral contests. According to the media survey done by *Herald*, almost 30 percent of the *nazims* of Punjab were the former members of provincial assemblies. The survey also found that majority of the *nazims* had come from landowning political families.³⁸ The absence of land reforms accompanied with non-partisan nature of local bodies' elections significantly discouraged the public participation. The non-party elections gave the influential landed elites a good chance to exert their influence by manipulating the *biraderi* networks.³⁹ Consequently, the ethnic and caste divisions were exacerbated which further undermined the already weakened political parties and destroyed their organizational credibility. The electoral candidates neither had policies nor did they represent any kind of ideology.⁴⁰ Though President Musharraf claimed that

37 Saeed Shafqat and Saeed Wahalah "Experimenting with Democratic Governance: The Impact of the 2001 Local Government Ordinance on Pakistan's Bureaucracy" in *Pakistan 2005* eds., Charles H. Kennedy and Cynthia Botterton (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2006), 214.

38 *Herald*, August 2001.

39 ICG, *Devolution in Pakistan: Reform or Regression?* 12.

40 Mohammad Waseem, "Elections without a Mandate," *Dawn*, August 5, 2001.

the non-partisan nature of elections would reduce party rivalries and elected representatives would work for their respective constituencies irrespective of their political affiliations but later he himself negated his claim by making a coercive use of local government officials to win referendum and secure his presidency.⁴¹

Their domination of land owning class was further strengthened by another trend. In three districts of Sindh, 36 members of union councils and 66 *nazims* were selected in 'uncontested' elections. In this way, 300,000 voters were denied the opportunity to cast their meaningful vote.⁴² This was a clear reflection of feudal and tribal power in the rural areas. Thus, the district system could not come up to the expectations of the people.

In 2002, Musharraf promulgated Police Order 2002 which made the district police chief answerable to the elected mayor for the performance of police functions with the exception of 'investigation of criminal cases and police functions relating to prosecution'.⁴³ The district police officer was required to submit an annual policing plan to the district *nazim* which must be approved by the latter. Consequently, the district police became subservient to the elected officials majority of whom were landlords with only five to ten years of education.⁴⁴ These uneducated elected representatives used police officials against their opponents. Instead of working for the maintenance of law and order, the police became a tool in the hands of politicians who exploited it for their personal gains.

One of the good features of the devolution plan was that it gave much financial autonomy to the districts essential for the fiscal decentralization. However, the union councils which comprised the lowest tier in the local government hierarchy were devoid of any financial autonomy. Their working was

41 Ian Talbot, "General Pervaiz Musharraf: Saviour or Destroyer of Pakistan's Democracy?" *Contemporary South Asia* 11, no. 3 (2002): 314-315.

42 *The News*, August 17, 2002.

43 *Police Order 2002*.

44 Niaz, *The Culture of Power*, 200.

dependent upon the whims of the district *nazims* who used to stop giving funds to the union councils in case of their different political affiliations. This also affected the useful functioning of the local bodies system.⁴⁵

Like the previous devolution schemes in the country, Musharraf's plan also did not involve Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Denial of local government laws to these areas resulted in the increase of already existing political vacuum. Besides, the Federal Capital Territory and military cantonments were also left out of the scheme.

Second Local Government Elections (2005)

The local governments elected in 2001, completed their four year tenure. In 2005 the second local bodies' elections were held. During the elections of 2001, the voters' turnout was quite high as people were expecting that the new system would empower them by ensuring democratic governance. However, due to the poor performance of local governments, the turnout remained low in 2005. The elections were once again conducted on non-party basis. They were severely criticized by independent observers and opposition parties on the charge of rigging and manipulation by the ruling government of PML (Q).

In order to make the functional performance of local governments better than before, changes and amendments were required in the initially drafted devolution scheme but no attention was paid to this aspect. The local governments once again continued to perform with the same procedural loopholes and the result was not much different than before.

In 2008, the General Elections were held in the country and the Pakistan People's Party came to power by forming a coalition government. Being an elected government, it vowed to devolve political powers by granting maximum provincial autonomy. It proposed the 18th Amendment which was a major contribution in decentralizing political powers. The

45 Niaz, *The Culture of Power*, 130.

amendment dealt with all the issues except the local governments.⁴⁶ It provided a good enabling environment for the complete devolution but the third tier of government was neglected. Consequently, the next local government elections which were due in 2009 could not be held.

Local governments are the essential grassroots organizations that perform necessary administrative functions and play an important role in establishing genuine democracy. It is ironic that during the military regime of Pervez Musharraf the local governments remained functional but the elected PPP government made them dysfunctional in 2009 despite its rhetoric of establishing democracy by empowering people. Though the local government system had some loopholes in it but they could have been removed by making improvements in it. However, not even a single political party stressed on the need of this system or made efforts to empower the local governments.

The political parties in Pakistan are highly centralized in nature.⁴⁷ Albeit they keep on stressing the need of establishing democracy yet they, themselves, are run on the principle of 'dynastic politics' where all the power is concentrated in the hands of the respective party chairmen. There is no concept of devolution of powers in the political parties and all the decisions are made by the top leadership. It is, perhaps, because of this political culture that the elected governments have never felt the need to undertake any serious effort to form a genuine democracy by devolving power to the local governments.⁴⁸ Besides, in all the three local government systems in Pakistan, the military rulers deliberately excluded the political parties. This strategy was devised to counter the popular support of political parties by

46 Abid Musti Khan, "Ambiguities of the Eighteenth Amendment," *The Express Tribune*, July 13, 2015.

47 Zahid Hussain, "Dynastic Politics," *Dawn*, July 24, 2012.

48 Mazhar Abbas, "'Sham Democracy' in Political Parties," *The News*, October 20, 2016.

nurturing a new class of local leaders.⁴⁹ These local leaders play an important role in providing the non-representative military regimes a political connection to local constituencies throughout the country. Consequently, the political parties view the non-partisan local governments as a tool to create political base for dictators by displacing the functional organization of parties at the local level.

Conclusion

Despite motives of regime legitimacy, the devolution scheme was a good initiative taken by Musharraf regime. It altered the very foundations of the bureaucracy at the district level by placing elected officials in a supervisory role over bureaucrats. It was the first major attempt in the history of the country through which the supremacy of the elected representatives was established at the local level. The district was no longer the monopoly of the Commissioners belonging to the powerful District Management Group. Rather, people were given the opportunity to choose their representatives through votes. People's participation in the political process increased and consequently, democracy at the local level began to take roots.

The devolution plan did have some administrative lacunae which in turn affected its practical implementation. It was prepared in haste by the military government in order to establish its credentials as people's government determined to improve governance by devolving powers to the local level. Consequently, the scheme lacked coherence. It lacked the clarity regarding the powers and functions of different stakeholders which resulted in growing tensions between the elected *nazims* and the district coordination officers. Moreover, it did not introduce land reforms which became one of the most important factors in the continued dominance of the landed elite at the local level; in particular, the rural areas. However, these loopholes could have been addressed by making amendments in the devolution scheme.

49 Abbas, "'Sham Democracy' in Political Parties".

Instead of improving the local government system, it was altogether neglected by the successive political government resulting in its collapse in 2009. The PPP-led coalition government did not undertake any measures to make amendments in the Local Government Ordinance 2001 on the pretext that the local governments had failed to deliver over the past few years. It is quite unfortunate in our country that whenever a government initiates a new scheme or system of governance, it is often discontinued by the successive government on the grounds that the system could not deliver. Those at the helm of power do not realize the fact that institutional change always takes place gradually and continuity is its key to success. No system can be perfect from day one. Every system has some shortcomings which cannot be removed overnight. They can only be removed if the system is allowed to work without any discontinuity.