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# Issue of Bureaucratic Accountability in the Historical and Contemporary Perspective of Pakistan: Problems and Prospects

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*Bureaucratic Accountability in Pakistan is an important issue that requires scrutiny for comprehending its constraints and potentials. The aim of this research is to establish the meaning of the phenomena of bureaucratic accountability in Pakistan. The Grounded theory is used on archival material and interviewing as data collection techniques. Important to understand the issue of bureaucratic accountability in Pakistan is to observe its role in the political context in which it operates. External and internal accountability of the civil services of Pakistan has been seriously eroded due to politicization, growing culture of patronage, cronyism, favoritism and in-group feelings. There is lack of political commitment to put in place institution-based and transparent bureaucratic accountability mechanism. As a result, there has been no change and even the downward trajectory in multiple areas in the bureaucratic accountability mechanism is observed in Pakistan.*

**Keywords:** Bureaucratic accountability, cronyism, political context

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## 1. Introduction

### a. Internal-external and formal, external-internal and informal mechanism of accountability

Administrators possess authority and influence in many societies due to their expertise, permanence, status, discipline, organizational structure and their closeness to the corridors of political power. The administrators' Accountability is inevitable to make sure credibility of government and justify the role of the civil servants as the real servant of the people (Jabbara & Dwivedi, 1988). The accountability mechanisms of the bureaucracy can be internal-external and formal, external-internal and informal (Gilbert, 1987). Internal-external and formal tools of bureaucracy are the hierarchical arrangements, rules and regulations, performance evaluation, legislative checks, judicial review, Ombudsman and so on (Smith, 1991). External –internal and informal consists of personal values, professional codes, media, public opinion, Interest and pressure groups, and etc. Jabbara and Dwivedi define bureaucratic accountability in these words: (1988-5),

“Public service accountability involves the methods by which a public agency or a public official fulfills its duties and obligations, and the process by which that agency or the public official is required to account for such actions”.

Cooper (1986: 45) suggested a broader perspective of administrative accountability four variables comprised of citizens, politicians, civil servants and public policies. This is helpful in an analysis of administrative accountability process in a context of any country. Moreover, Administrators also execute policies and have discretionary powers in its implementation (Jabbara & Dwivedi:8).

### b. Accountability of the bureaucrats in the democratic and undemocratic regimes

Accountability and responsibility of the power- holders reflect significant characteristic of the democratic set-up. Political representatives are held accountable and answerable to the citizens by transparent, free, competitive elections (A. Hetland, Personal Communication, and June 25, 2018)). Finally, in the democratic set-up, accountability of the civil servants is to the citizens of the country. Accountability for the bureaucrats is an inevitable to ensure credibility and trust of government and to promote the spirit of the public functionaries as the true servants of the people. It is the basic right of a citizen to register a complaint against unsympathetic or callous behavior of a bureaucrat irrespective of the form of government (Hurwitz, 1981). Accountability is not to the citizens in the undemocratic regime and it may be to a dictator, a political party, or to an ideology. It is confined to legal and fiscal accountability.

### **c. Lack of multi-pronged procedures for accountability**

The problem of administrative accountability in the developing countries is partially that due to accountability mechanism are inherited from the colonial regime. Moreover, many developing states do not have multi-pronged procedures for accountability in place and holders of power do not courage the promotion of such a framework (I. Husain, Interview, August 2, 2018). Emphasis is exclusively on the internal and formal accountability and informal and external mechanisms are ignored. For example, legislative committees exercise little or no proper check over the administrative sector ((M. Ali, Interview, February 25, 2018). Ombudsmen are subjected to limitations. The external and informal instruments of accountability in authoritarian regimes are oppressed, the polity is depoliticized and the media and civil societies are tightly controlled. They are not allowed to criticize ruling elites, its policies and bureaucrats. Accountability practices against the bureaucrats have been on the decline in the modern democratic government. However, it needs to be improved (Smith, 1991). Accountability cannot be effective if the external and informal mechanisms of accountability do not work very well.

### **d. An assessment of bureaucratic accountability in the existing political context**

In the states, where political representatives do not have legitimacy for their rule and are not properly accountable to the public or legal institutions, there is a little hope for administrators to perform in an accountable behavior. However, important to understand bureaucratic accountability in the developing states is the high need to observe its role in the socio- political context in which it operates. That is the reason some polities have been described as bureaucratic ones. The military has been a major actor in politics in some of the developing states (T. Rahman, Interview, April 25, 2018). Military has been justifying accountability drive as an excuse for a coup to redress the maladministration and corruption of the preceding civil regime. Bureaucrats and bureaucracies usually exercise considerable clout in the polity in collusion with military in the society (I. Husain, Interview, August 2, 2018).

## **2 Historical Background of bureaucratic-set-up in Pakistan**

Pakistan's colonial heritage has great impact on its bureaucratic and political institutions (Islam, 1989). Colonial regime developed strong and highly centralized bureaucratic set-up during the 19th and 20th centuries. It was administered by the Indian Civil Service (ICS). While manipulated democratic institutions were gradually allowed into colonial India. The 'elected representatives' role was to recommend rather than to decide. Powers were not transferred to these democratic institutions but they were formed to legitimize and strengthen the bureaucratic state (Washbrook, 1997). Thus Pakistan inherited very sound bureaucratic institutions from colonial rulers and weak democratic institutions. Since the

withdrawal of British from India-Pak, bureaucratic institutions of the country have played assertive and influential role in the governing structure as compared to democratic actors. They, in collusion with power military elites, exercised powers in the corridors of government directly or indirectly at the expense of the political institutions of accountability (M. Azhar, Interview, March 16, 2018).

### **3 Intervention of Civil bureaucracy in Politics and bureaucratic accountability**

For the early decade after partition (1947-1958), political scenario of Pakistan was dominated by senior civil servants with the support by the military elites. The governor-general, representing the bureaucracy, derailed the political process. Ghulam Mohammad, the third governor-general, took the extra-constitutional dismissal of the elected Prime Minister; Khwaja Nazimuddin in 1953 despite the latter was supported by majority of the members of the parliament (Newman, 1959). He also dismissed the Constituent Assembly when it had almost completed its task of constitution-making. Ghulam Mohammad also institutionalized the role of the army into polity by including the army's commander-in-chief, General Ayub Khan, as defense minister in the cabinet. Iskander Mirza took the charge of the governor-general, replacing Ghulam Muhammad and later on as head of state in 1956. He misused his powers of dismissal of prime minister given under 1956 constitution. Mirza manipulated this power and dismissed four cabinets from 1956 to 1958 with the political engineering of ill-organized and undisciplined political parties and political elites. He also took the civil-military bureaucrats in to confidence on this account (M. Azhar, Interview, March 16, 2018). Resultantly, the external instruments of the bureaucratic accountability such as legislative review, advisory committees, and judicial actions and so on remained weak to make civil servants accountable.

### **4. Nexus between Civil-Military Bureaucracy and bureaucratic accountability**

In the beginning, the Civil Service faced challenge from the military regime of 1958 because it was held partly responsible for the political instability. General Ayub Khan established Screening Committees in the light of Martial law regulation (62). As a result of the proceedings of these committees, eighty four civil servants comprising 12 CSP officers were dismissed from services (Chaudry, 2011:96). Taking into account strong civil-military nexus to administer the country during Ayub era, the initial purge of the civil servants did not prove to be meaningful to make them accountable (Chaudry, 2011:96-97). Later on, the bureaucracy led by the elite CSP cadre, became as the willing junior partner of the military regime to serve its agenda. According to a political analyst, it was the civil bureaucracy that basically administers the governing structure during the rule of Ayub Khan. Ayub's top priority was to marginalize politicians and political parties (Z. Hussain, Interview, April 26, 2018). He not only banned political parties but also disqualified many politicians to take part in politics through the Elective Bodies (Disqualification) Order (EBDO). The EBDO was discriminately used

against anti-regime politicians (Jones, 2003:30). Three tribunals, including a senior judge, a civil servant and an army officer, were authorized to implement the order. Civil bureaucrats, almost always belonging to CSP cadre, supported the regime system of the Basic Democracies and Rural Development programs. They also chaired basic democrats at divisional, district and sub-district levels and exercised control over them, including the power to set aside or suspend their decisions. That enhanced its powers, patronage; perks and privilege (N. Mahmood, Interview, June 22, 2018). They also manipulated local politics through local bodies by keeping away political forces from citizens. As a result of this marriage of convince between bureaucracy and military, bureaucratic elites kept them safe from external accountability.

### ***5. The 1973 administrative reforms and its impacts on the bureaucratic accountability***

In 1969, Ayub Khan handed over power to Yahya Khan. He suspended 303 senior bureaucrats on charges of misuse of authority, corruption, misconduct. They were tried and removed from services by specially formed military tribunals so as to strengthen military rule on the administration. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, due to PPP's victory in West Pakistan in the 1970 polls, replaced Yahya Khan as president and chief martial law administrator. Bhutto compulsorily retired approximately civil servants numbering 1,300 on the charges of corruption and inefficiency and misuse of authorities so as to eliminate the increasing leverage and influence of the civil bureaucracy (Burki, 1980:102). He was ambitious to place bureaucracy under the control of political executive (Anwar, 1992:135). Bhutto also did away with constitutional guarantee laid down for civil servants. Occupational groups replaced the CSP specific structure and reservations of posts for CSP cadre in the Federal government were removed. The removal of these protections damaged the civil service and paved the way for political intervention and manipulation (Shafqat, 1999) Bhutto's administrative brought fundamental changes structure of the bureaucracy. The CSP cadre was divided into a Tribal Areas Group (TAG), the Police Group, a new Secretariat Group, and District Management Group (DMG). Lateral Entry scheme was introduced and many officials of various ranks and grades were directly entered into the civil bureaucracy of Pakistan. The Federal Public Service Commission was bypassed and they were recruited by a Special Selection Board. It was consisted of cabinet members who reported directly to the Prime Minister. Many lateral entrants, inducted into civil services, had political affiliation. Thus the politicization of the civil service quickly happened (Jalal, 1995). Bhutto actually wanted to ensure to implement his policies and programs through the literal entrants in the face of self-interested civil servants. Although organizational structure of civil services underwent change but Bhutto's reforms did not succeed to curb the bureaucracy's prestige, power and leverage (S. Rahman, Interview, April 10, 2018). Their authority actually increased as a result of government policy of nationalization and the bureaucrats had not been limited to their own power domain but they suddenly found lucrative positions due to their

expanded role in the of the public sector. That provided the bureaucrats new avenues for corruption and prestige (Z.Hussain, Interview, April 26, 2018). Thus the bureaucracy was politicized as a result of Bhutto's administrative initiatives. It neither institutionalized the internal accountability mechanism of administrative accountability nor did external accountability by the elected institutions. These reforms have far-reaching results, which marred the effectiveness and independence of the civil servants. The neutrality and effectiveness of the bureaucracy was compromised when pro-ruling party civil servants were appointed to senior posts so as to serve the vested interests of their political masters (B. Ayaz, Interview May 12 2018). As a result of the lack of bureaucratic accountability, the concept of a neutral, fair and competent civil service vanished.

### ***6. Military's role institutionalized in to bureaucratic structure***

Zia set up a commission on civil service reforms. The commission recommended radical changes in Bhutto's reforms system. However, Zia mostly continued the previous the federal bureaucratic structure except abolishing lateral recruitment and merged the TAG into the DMG. Moreover, Zia took a significant step to institutionalize the role of the military into bureaucratic structure. The earlier civilian or military governments inducted military personnel into the civil service on an adoc basis (Shafqat & Wahla, 2005). Zia reserved 10 percent of vacancies of BPS-17 and 18 in the federal bureaucracy for military officers. These officers would be selected by a High Powered Selection Committee chaired by Zia himself. Ayesha Jalal is of the opinion that the bureaucracy's role became subordinate one as a result of Zia regime strategy to appoint military officials to important jobs in the central and provincial departments of the government (1995: 104-105). However, no serious efforts were made to strengthen the internal and external mechanism of bureaucratic accountability during Zia regime. The bureaucracy, in collusion with military regime, exercised powers in the corridors of powers directly or indirectly at the expense of the political institutions of accountability.

### **7. Politicization of the Bureaucracy under civilian governments (1988-1999)**

The Nawaz Sharif's PML-N, Benazir Bhutto's PPP and each came in to power twice from 1988-1999. They left no stone unturned in destabilizing and undermining each other governments. In order to advance their vested interests both Sharif and Bhutto had formed the team of their favorite civil servants (Z. Hussain, Interview, April 26, 2018). They were obliged and appointed on key positions because of their subordination to their respective political leaders. A retired bureaucrat, who worked as a secretary during the 1990s said:

"Bureaucrats were appointed on very important posts due to their known political affiliation rather than their professionalism and talent, PPP and PML(N) facilitated an arena where the corrupt and the dishonest could get away with their

malpractices— be they tax-evading business class ,political actors, or selfish bureaucrats” (M. Azhar, Interview, March 16, 2018).

These civil governments brought in their favorite bureaucrat to hold key post. Political loyalty rather than professional competence became the acid test for their promotion and holding of important positions. Acquiescent civil servants in collusion with the corrupt Politicians saved themselves from internal and external accountability ( M. Ayub, Personal Communication, May 2018). Not surprisingly, this practice has been frequently referred in interviews as a major reason of increasing disappointments and frustration amongst competent and honest bureaucrats who realized their promotional prospects blocked by political favoritism ( M. Akbar, Interview, 25 August 2017). While the losers were ordinary people who ceased to have approach to civil servants and had no way of having their problems redressed. The political masters hailed from rural backgrounds till 70s and the bureaucracy ruled supreme during this period. By the 90s, Pakistan governments came under the control of a PML (N) headed business family with dynastic potential and PPP came under a party holding the arrogance of people’s power and a dynastic tradition too. At that time it seemed that there were only these two political parties that would take turns to rule Pakistan. Opportunistic civil servants found that being affiliated with either by the PPP the ‘PML-N’ was the only way of ensuring a decent career trajectory (Noorani, 2018).The majority of civil servants are considered to affiliate to one or the other political party.

### ***8. Civil bureaucracy under the tutelage of military***

Nine-year rule of Musharraf witnessed a great rise in military intervention in the civil services of Pakistan. Musharraf appointed monitoring teams of armed forces to check many civil departments at all levels. Junior military officers conduct supervision and evaluation of the performance of senior civil bureaucrats (Z. Hussain, Interview, April 26, 2018). The civil bureaucracy realized humiliation and demoralization by this exercise of the regime. The monitoring teams, comprising 3,500 serving and retired military personnel, were obviously formed with the purpose of reducing corruption and enhancing accountability of the civil servants. This led to violation of authority and power ( M. Akbar, Interview, 25 August 2017).Military retired or serving officials were also assigned important civilian positions, such as the chairmanship of chairman of the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority, chairman of Pakistan Steel Mill, the Alternative Energy Development Board, and the Federal Public Service Commission (FPSC).Military supervised and controlled almost every dimension of the civil bureaucracy, from recruitment to postings and promotions, The Pakistan Administrative Staff College and the Civil Services Academy were chaired by a retired lieutenant general and a retired major general respectively. Appointment of military officers as heads of civil service training institution cannot be justified (Z.Hussain, Interview, April 26, 2018). It was unthinkable for the military officials

to be authorized for making this government policy and to train its bureaucrats. At unprecedented level, Musharraf's regime inducted serving and retired military officers into the civil services. All the important civil service institutions were chaired by retired military officers. This practice was a cause of increasing disappointment amongst senior bureaucrats because of their promotion chances obstructed by military appointees (H. Bugti, Interview, October 23, 2017). The politicians and civil societies also resented the increasing monopolization of power and policymaking in the civil institutions by military regime. According to a senior bureaucrat: (I. Husain, Interview August 2, 2018):

Growing cause for concern is the civilian bureaucracy's professional decline due its dependence on the capacity of military rather than the capacity of the bureaucratic expertise

As a result of democratic process started under the tutelage of military, Pro-military regime political parties formed governments at the national and provincial levels. Democracy implies rule of law, besides electoral competition, majority rule and respect for internal and external accountability of the state institutions have a lot of importance. The civil services became further politicized and the role of a civil servant a professional, neutral, upright, people friendly public servant was considerably diminished (M. Ayub, Personal Communication, May 2018); (H. Bugti, Interview, October 23, 2017). Political leaders and political parties in power did not take into consideration that internal bureaucratic accountability can only improve with successful operating of an efficient, professionally competent, merit driven and non-partisan bureaucracy. For good external accountability of bureaucracy, political will and political commitment is a prerequisite. The Civil Services of Pakistan were faced with the challenge how to operate in a quasi-democratic polity. The politicians blatantly violated the spirit of democracy (K. Qayum, Personal Communication, 17 October, 2018). From 1999-2008, the political feuds among the political leadership and political parties has polarized the politics Pakistan. This political polarization has affected almost all government institutions including Civil Services. Resultantly, the Civil Services failed to act as an anchor institution to provide stability for democratic system. No doubt, Civil Services ensure continuity of state policies regardless of who possesses political power, their responsibility is to resolve conflicts over policies of government and create consensus that is necessary for continuity and success of the official policies (M. Waqar. Interview, 2 April 2018.) Given their institutional norms and values, civil servants can play a pivotal role in strengthening democratic institutions (K. Qayum, Personal Communication, 17 October, 2018). Good accountability process has two aspects: Political and technical. The Political side envisages rule of law, adherence to the culture of the accountability in the society and to promote the role of independent media, parliamentary and judicial and semi-judicial institutions of accountability. The technical aspect of accountability mechanism envisages professional, competent, trained, accountable civil service.



### **9. The Bureaucratic Accountability at the local level**

The contemporary analysis of the local bodies reflects that there has been a change in the tendency of central governments to use the bureaucratic control over the local system of governments (A.Hetland, Personal Communication, June 25, 2018) It was most explicitly exercised during the British colonial and Ayub regimes. The Musharraf regime made the local bureaucracy less strong or powerful by assigning a lot of their functions to local governments which were elected on non-party basis. Moreover, the post of the deputy commissioner was also abolished in this direction (I.Shahid, Interview, July 5, 2018). This weakening of bureaucratic control over local bodies shows an important deviation from the previous tradition where Centre sought political support from an alliance between the bureaucracy and powerful rural elites (Hasan, 2002). The military chose to abandon the bureaucratic control model because of the increased organizational ability of local elites to provide political support for the military regime.

More importantly, the provincial bureaucrats were made externally accountable at the local level to the elected heads. However, it needs to be described that district civil servants also remained under administrative authority of the provincial secretariats which was exercised in favor of the district bureaucracy against the Nazims (Z.Hussain, Interview, April 26, 2018).

### **Conclusion**

The major challenge to the cause of greater bureaucratic accountability in Pakistan is the absence of commitment and spirit of the politician actors towards real and across-the-board accountability process. The majority of civil servants compromised played second fiddle to the civil and military rulers to make themselves up in the slippery slope of the civil services pyramid. Moreover, corrupt civil servants made themselves safe from internal and external accountability process. The fundamental obstacles to the external accountability of the civil service in Pakistan are primarily political in nature. The Political aspect of accountability envisages rule of law, adherence to the norms and values of concept of accountability. The technical aspect of accountability provided for effective, skilled, dynamic, and professional civil servants. Political interference reduced the spirit of responsibility, answerability, effectiveness and professionalism among the civil servants. Internal accountability of the bureaucracy suffered from cronyism, favoritism, in-group feelings, and rules available for internal accountability of the civil servants suffered from mutual interests. So far as external check on the bureaucracy by accountability watch dogs is concerned, these institutions lost credibility due to their selective, discriminatory, and politically motivated accountability process. The lesson is the same in all dimensions of bureaucratic accountability: better laws, stronger, greater, transparent accountability mechanisms and more transparency alone will lead to transitional phase of bureaucratic accountability in Pakistan.

## End Notes and Bibliography

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