
Bureaucratic Institution, Leadership and Breakup of a State: A Case Study of East Pakistan

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Abstract

The separation of East Pakistan in 1971 provides an appropriate case for the assessment of factors responsible for the success of any separatist movement. This paper attempts to focus the institution of bureaucracy that is, indicated by many as, partly accountable for the separation of East Pakistan. The paper takes up the point that the individual bureaucrats rather than the institution of bureaucracy ruled over the country most of the time that is considered as the time of bureaucratic rule. Another discovered point is that the bureaucratic institution in Pakistan had been built in such a way that one individual at the top of the hierarchy could easily run a whole machinery of the bureaucracy. Therefore the top leaders, bureaucratic as well political, were responsible for all of the ills of the country including the menace of separatism that led to the separation of East Pakistan. The paper is analysis based and the sources include the official documents, biographies and research books. Quantitative data has also been analysed for the clarification of some concepts.

1. Introduction

Bureaucracy as an important institution of state may be supposed responsible for many ills and goods in modern states. The responsibility of East Pakistan's separation from Pakistan in 1971 may be laid on bureaucracy if it is assumed that this organised institution governed the country and influenced decision-making from 1947 to 1971. Provincial politicians too alleged that the central control of provincial administration through the civil servants had made a mockery of provincial autonomy.¹

Until the demise of Liaquat Ali Khan, first Prime Minister of Pakistan, in 1951 civil servants were closely attached with the power. Both Quaid-i-Azam Jinnah, first Governor General of Pakistan, and Liaquat Ali Khan relied heavily on the bureaucrats and Jinnah encouraged the top bureaucrats of various departments at the centre and the provincial chief secretaries to communicate with him directly on matters of vital interests.² Yet the analysts agree that civil servants found it virtually impossible to dominate the political system due to the able leadership of Jinnah and Liaquat Ali.³ After Liaquat Ali's death leading role of the politicians ended and the period of the ascendant bureaucracy began, which continued until October 1958 when the military seized control from its partner in complicity.⁴

Some scholars consider that the civil bureaucracy continued to wield power after the introduction of martial law. So great was the dependence of Ayub government on its cooperation that it was armed with greater powers and shielded from public criticism.⁵ Therefore it is assumed that the bureaucracy continued its rule which had been gathered during 1951-1958 when the chief executives were members of bureaucracy during the martial law regime through a new legitimizing agent, on the place of political leadership, the Armed Forces.⁶ After the promulgation of martial law, within a few years the President became a 'prisoner' of the

bureaucracy because the civil servants regained their position at the end of 1959, and henceforth bureaucracy played a dominant role in policy-making during the Ayub regime.⁷

This assumption is true only when influence of bureaucracy as an institution is compared with political parties, judiciary and other institutions and not with the leadership. Even when civil bureaucracy will be compared with military bureaucracy the significance of the former will diminish.

2. Leaders Domination over Institution of Bureaucracy

2.1 Bureaucracy in Parliamentary Period

Only the period from 1951 to 1958 can be considered as the period of bureaucratic rule because three former bureaucrats – Malik Ghulam Muhammad, General Iskandar Mirza and Chaudhry Muhammad Ali – remained on highest power positions of the country during this period. Therefore it is assumed that whenever the bureaucratic set up felt that its power and privilege were being threatened either by the legislature or by other socio-political forces operating within the country, it would either dismiss the legislature or split the political parties or play one politician against the other.⁸

Even during this period the bureaucracy, as institution, was not ruling party and some persons or a group of persons – smaller elite belonging to different classes – dominated the power game. Bureaucratic personnel could have an edge over political leadership but this was because inept political leaders provided the civil servants a chance to dominate. Notwithstanding the relative superiority in personal ability and experience of the average civil servant over the average politician, the Ministers were inexperienced, amateurish and unable to grasp the operations of departmental business.

Higher civil servants played an undue part in the formation of policy - often the jurisdiction of a Minister (political leader) - this was not with every political leader but

happened only when the politicians could not take the initiative in this respect. They used to leave the matter to the Permanent Secretaries. The able leaders in government like Liaquat Ali were not so dependent upon officials. While the less able Khawaja Nazimuddin who formulated no policies of his own⁹ could not dominate the civil servants and due to his indecisiveness and inept policies, the power of politicians declined steadily.¹⁰

Frank Goodnow establishes the strength and influence of the CSPs on the propositions that president/GG exercised a decisive control over the GOP since 1953 being an ally of the civil and military services. Seven actions of President/GG from 1953 to 1958: dismissal of Nazimuddin Ministry; refusal to Suhrawardy to demonstrate majority in CAP; dissolution of first CAP; appointment of 'Cabinet of Talent'; prevention of the provincial assemblies from meeting so that the province could be ruled either by the President or by a governor; consolidation of the One Unit and harassment of provincial and central ministers ascertained the hold of powerful chief executive then allied with the CSP's thus civil servants were strengthened.¹¹

The arguments of Goodnow, established to prove the strength of the bureaucracy, in fact prove the importance of three individuals who originated from bureaucracy and used the CSPs for the establishment of their own rule and strengthened them in return. Thus it was not the institution that inserted its representatives in the government but some individuals got much power and used the institution of bureaucracy for fulfilment of their interests. President Mirza was one of them. He was loyal to no group or organisation except that provided him the chance to remain in power. He had never outgrown the role of a political agent of the NWFP where his training and experience had been such that he knew only one way of achieving his objects, namely the old frontier game of setting one tribe against another.¹² His identification with the Civil Service of Pakistan in an address to a meeting of the Civil Service of Pakistan

Association in 1957 by saying "As one of you, I find it very refreshing to talk to you"¹³ is just a tactic to keep this group and institution in his favour. To carry on his personal rule he used bureaucracy as a card for winning over other power group which might be better partner.

The ruling bureaucrats worked in personal capacities and not in collective team. There was the personal clashes and desires among the members of the bureaucratic elite. They did not work as a political interest group but every one of them worked in his personal capacity. Every one had different sphere and corner of influence. It was partial support for every one of them that they could use the strength of the bureaucracy. Ch. M Ali's resignation, for example, can be taken in the perspective of his personality. By nature he was honest, dedicated and loyal. It was due to his affiliation with the bureaucracy that he shared its inherent contempt for politicians and political activity. Most probably he had played in the hands of Ghulam Muhammad and Iskandar Mirza out of this reason.¹⁴ Iskandar Mirza, through his interminable intrigues and manoeuvres to 'establish personal control over the destiny of the country,'¹⁵ played tricks with Ghulam Muhammad and Chaudhury Muhammad Ali as well.

2.2 Bureaucracy under Ayub

When Ayub took over in 1958 he and his generals dominated over civil bureaucracy. A ruthless action was taken against the unwanted elements of bureaucracy during the first years of Ayub regime Justice Munir tells that Ayub made him the Chairman of Screening Committee saying "We (Ayub and Munir) have to run the country" with the object of removing only specified officers without holding proper inquiry and giving them full opportunity to disprove the allegations against them.¹⁶ Screening of the officers and employees of All-Pakistan services and Classes 1, 2, and 3 of the Central services was made and in the result of that

screening action against 1662 officers was taken of whom 71 had been compulsorily retired, 3 summarily dismissed, and 10 downgraded.¹⁷ This action assured the cooperation of civil bureaucracy under the domination of army.

Afterwards the civil Bureaucracy as an institution was used as useful machinery for the maintenance of the personal rule of military ruler. Despite the steps to reform the administrative structure for decentralizing the administration¹⁸ the regime was satisfied with minor tinkering of the CSP and major administrative reforms were ruled out. Ayub government relied upon the civil service as an instrument of the vice regal and colonial-style rule. Although in the beginning of the military rule the CSP was unsure about its future, with time it reached a working relation with the regime.¹⁹

While the CSP officers continued to predominate in secretariat and other important administrative posts, their influence in the affairs of the state declined appreciably – in part because of the administrative experience and competence of the ministers, but primarily because the new ministers and martial law administrators enjoyed the confidence and the support of the President.²⁰ In West Pakistan, for example, it had become more difficult for senior civil servants to resist political pressures and to take decisions. The Governor too was ruthless with civil servants who took too independent line or otherwise incur his dislike.²¹

Ayub regime had eroded the independent advisory role of permanent services in the policymaking process. The silence or servility of the top civil servants, during the post-army operation period, was noted in the proceedings of the President's weekly meetings. The difficult time which the general civil servants were having during Ayub regime has been described by Hasan Zaheer through the impressions of the three participants of the meetings; Umer, Roedad Khan and Agha Shahi.²²

Ayub relied on bureaucrats as Akhter Husain, S. M. Yusuf, Fida Hasan and Altaf Gauhar for advice. Sardar Shaukat Hayat was most probably pointing to the same group of CSPs called 'young Turks' around Ayub who flattered him and persuaded him that he was the only man who knew what was good for the nation.²³ Ayub was too dominant, however that all important key decisions and surprising number of minor decisions were taken by Ayub himself.²⁴ Thus when A. R. Khan, in his replies to the questionnaire of the Constitution Commission bemoaned that "a powerful clique in the bureaucracy did not want democracy to function in Pakistan and therefore did not want any constitution"²⁵ he was pointing out some influential bureaucrats rather than bureaucracy that was an obstacle in the way of constitution. Likewise the Bengalis had complaints against the Chief Secretary Aziz Ahmad and considered him an autocratic civil servant who had caused much damage during his tenure.²⁶

2.3. Constitutional Powers of Bureaucracy given to one-man Chief Executive

The bureaucratic elite had an edge over the political elite due to incapability of the latter but civil bureaucracy as an organisation could never become the master of the destiny of the country as well as its own fate. The organisation of bureaucracy for which Khalid B. Sayeed observed that "the GOP might be described a pyramid carved out of a single rock, and the civil servants had captured the apex of the pyramid. Below the apex are several layers of authority descending downwards from the secretariat level to the base of the pyramid, the district administration"²⁷ has often been under one man's or group's control.

The power was limited to a small group of people who centred around one man and that one individual was all in all. The weakness of legislature or elected representatives vis-à-vis the bureaucracy, who cooperated the Chief Executive

and were not barred, gave CSPs full control over the government.²⁸ But it is significant that all reins of the bureaucracy were given to one man, president/GG, and not to the bureaucracy itself or to any other institution.

The Chief Executive – a single man or dictator – needed a system to represent his authority over the common people. He, fortunately for him, had a governmental structure lent itself to control by an elite group of administrators or by one man. The centralized exercise of power by the secretariat²⁹ could also help the few people to control over whole machinery of civil service. There was a hierarchy of decision-making personnel from the district officer to the President/GG. Even, despite Pakistan being a federation constitutionally, the provincial governments were under the firm control of the central government because of the latter's emergency powers, its control over personnel, its greater financial resources and the institutional habits and precedents that constituted Pakistan's inheritance from the days of British rule. Therefore the Central and provincial secretaries, who were, in a very real sense, the administrative communication centres and played a dominant role in the governing of Pakistan,³⁰ were lured by or used by the President.

Constitutionally a single personality could control the civil bureaucracy and it is not fair to conceptualize that the chief executive had no legal power to control the bureaucracy since the tenure of civil servants was protected by constitutional guarantees.³¹ GG's powers of appointing higher services continued to be in Constitution 1956. For all of the higher services, the Constitution of 1956 provided that appointments be made either by the President or a person designated by him. All posts to which members of these services were assigned were held "during the pleasure of the President."³² Although the Constitution required the President to act "in accordance with the advice of the Cabinet or the appropriate Minister,"³³ the Cabinet or Ministers had no remedy if he failed to do so, because an

other paragraph in the Constitution stated: "The question whether any, and if so, what, advice has been tendered by the Cabinet, or a Minister or Minister of State, shall not be inquired into in any court."³⁴

The procedure of the recruitment of the bureaucracy and disciplinary actions against it also provided the Chief Executive a chance to have an obvious administrative control on the civil bureaucracy. This procedure revolved round a PSC.³⁵ The Commission had very little power in the legal sense, because it was strictly advisory; it recommended but did not itself appoint or discipline. The president could remove certain positions by order from the purview of the Commission, and he so ordered in the case of private secretaries to ministers and deputy ministers including the political secretary to the PMs; the heads of the Pakistan missions abroad; the chairman or members of the Tariff Commission; the economic adviser to the GOP; district and session judges appointed from the Bar; promotions of deputy superintendents of police to the rank of superintendents of police, and temporary posts. Either the President or the Establishment Division of the Cabinet Secretariat could undermine and render ineffectual the work of the Commission. It is not surprising, however, that they did not do so.³⁶

The President/GG did not need to interfere in the matters of the Commission because the members of the PSC were appointed by him and could serve for his purposes. From 1947 to February 1956 GG was to appoint the Chairman and members of PSC, determine the numerical strength of the commission, its tenure of office and their conditions of Service on the advice of the Cabinet.³⁷ The cabinet members were practically appointed with the consent and wishes of GG. From March 1956 to February 1962 the President by regulation, determined the number of members of the Commission and their conditions of Service. He appointed its Chairman and other members "in his discretion."³⁸ Under the Constitution of 1962 the power

of appointing the Chairman and members lied with the President.³⁹ All members of the PSC were to hold office during the pleasure of the Governor of the province concerned. No officer once appointed, could be removed or reduced in rank by any authority subordinate to the one that had made the appointment, unless specially authorized.⁴⁰ Right of appeal was not granted to the officer punitively dismissed by the President or Governor.⁴¹

Since the Cabinet in Pakistan was unstable and divided within itself, much of its work was done and many of the important decisions were made by those whom the Cabinet delegated its authority. Before the adoption of the Constitution of 1956 the rules were issued in the name of the GG, and later took their authority from a clause in the Constitution which stated: "The President shall also make rules for the allocation and transaction of the business of the Federal Government."⁴²

3. Leadership or Bureaucracy: Major Cause of Separation of East Pakistan?

The discrimination of the bureaucrats to the Bengalis and the representation of Bengalis in civil bureaucracy are two factors which can be attributed to bureaucracy for laying the responsibility of rise of separatism on this institution. The conduct of the top civil officers in Pakistan generally and in East Pakistan especially was enough to call it a colonial bureaucracy. Thus there is some truth in Tarzie Vittachi's opinion that "Brown Sahibs" had been substituted for white ones.⁴³ But this attitude of the civil officers was common in both wings of Pakistan. The discrimination in East Pakistan was based on the unjustified behaviour of the higher post-holders. From the outset most of the powerful bureaucrats such as the Secretary General, Chaudhri Mohammed Ali and Chief Secretary to the East Bengal Government, Aziz Ahmad were Punjabis. The Secretary for Defence, Iskandar Mirza, was the only exception.⁴⁴ Every

action of Secretary of Civil Supplies department, N.M. Khan expressed Punjabi Chauvinism. G.A. Farooqui, H.S.M. Ishaq, Hamid Ali, M.A. Isfahani and such type of other non Bengalis were appointed on key posts. None of these knew Bengali language.⁴⁵

It is also said that Chief Secretary, N.M. Khan, started playing a dual role. On the one hand, he kept on reminding the politicians that the bureaucracy was powerful enough to deal with any situation and, on the other hand, he successfully caused a breach between the AL and the KSP- the two big components of the UF.⁴⁶ The discriminative conduct of a few topmost bureaucrats with Bengali political leaders and the Bengali people deteriorated the image of bureaucracy as well as Pakistan Government in the eyes of political minded Bengalis.

3.1. Representation Factor:

To resolve the inherent issue of Bengali under representation in bureaucracy in September 1948, the central government fixed a quota system for recruitment. 15 per cent of the posts were reserved for the migrants and the remaining 85 per cent were to be equally shared between both wings. In 1950, however, 20 per cent of the posts were to be filled on merit and the rest were to be equally divided between both wings. This fixed ratio-system could not resolve the problem because even this ratio was not observed strictly on the ground that suitable candidates were not available from East Pakistan.⁴⁷ In order to equalize the number of bureaucrats from East Pakistan in Centre both PM Liaquat and Finance Minister Ghulam Muhammad had been anxious to secure East Bengal officers for the Centre, but good officers were reluctant to accept the offer on account of the serious disadvantages and heavy expenses. Khwaja Nazimuddin suggested an overseas allowance for the exchanged officers in both wings.⁴⁸

The balance between East and West Pakistan changed in subsequent decades but Bengalis did not satisfy. The representation of the both wings in ministries as well as

numerical distribution of gazetted and non gazetted officers in 1966 indicates that there was a wide gap between both wings and East Pakistan was outnumbered in bureaucracy.

Table 1
Representation of East and West Pakistan in the Ministries at the Centre (1966)

Ministries	West Pakistan	East Pakistan
President's Secretariat	81	19
Ministry of Commerce	63.6	36.4
Ministry of Defence	91.6	8.4
Ministry of Industries	74.4	25.6
Ministry of Education	66.7	33.3
Ministry of Health	81.0	19.0
Ministry of Agriculture	79.4	20.6
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	77.8	22.2
Ministry of Communications	82.8	17.8
Ministry of Finance	75.6	24.4

Source: *Matinuddin, 1994, p. 68.*

Table 2
Numerical Distribution of Gazetted and Non Gazetted Officers in 1966

West Pakistan		East Pakistan	
Gazetted	Non Gazetted	Gazetted	Non Gazetted
3708	82944	1338	26310

Source: *Feldman, 2001, p. 169.*

The above data shows that until 1966 the leadership could not do much for the representation of East Pakistan in bureaucracy. It was not the fault of bureaucracy but the ruling leaders were responsible for that who gave no thought to this serious gap. The leaders remained satisfied on the success of their policy thinking that the comparison of these figures with pre-partition period showed much development. The argument for comparison of East Pakistan with other provinces separately and not with combined West Pakistan could also give relief to the decision-makers.⁴⁹ Moreover

there was also an argument that East Pakistanis appeared in the civil service examinations in low numbers and were given priority over the Punjabi candidates.

The gap could have been filled by making policy of promoting able and experienced Bengal provincial service officers. The old civil service cadre rule, which reserved senior posts in the central and provincial governments for members of the Indian Civil Service, was adopted for the new Civil Service of Pakistan. Higher leadership of country could relax these rules in favour of Bengali provincial service officers, at least on a one-off basis to ensure regional balance.⁵⁰

Several administrative steps were taken both during the Ayub era and the Yahya regime to remove the grievances of the East Pakistanis. Ayub regime increased East Pakistan participation in key posts. The office of the chief controller of Imports and Exports was consistently given from 1963 to an East Pakistan representative; and deputy secretaries in the Cabinet and Establishment divisions after 1962 were invariably from East Pakistan. East Pakistanis were also appointed to head the IDBP and the State Bank of Pakistan. Still these steps failed to satisfy the Bengalis, who regarded the pace of change as too slow.⁵¹

In 1966, sixty percent of all government seats were reserved for East Pakistanis. By 1968 the Bengali representation in all government posts had risen to 36. President Yahya appointed an equal number of secretaries in the Centre from East and West Pakistan. He promoted with immediate effect six Bengali CSP officers to the Central Secretaries. He also gave directives to all the ministries that whenever a senior post became vacant, Bengali candidate for it should be accorded priority even if this meant disregarding the principle of seniority.⁵² In 1970 there was a growing number – almost touching to equality – of gazetted officers belonged to East Pakistan.

Table 3
Province wise list of officers of Grade 17 and above July 1, 1971

Punjab	199
East Pakistan	196
Sindh	62
NWFP	40
Balochistan	6
Total	503

Source: *Matinuddin, 1994, p. 111.*

But disturbing factor even then was the absence of East Pakistanis on influential and higher key posts. In this area the Bengalis remained underrepresented even in 1970. (See table 4).

Table 4
Civil Service Officers in Influential places 1965-70

	NWFP	Sindh	Balochistan	East Pakistan	Urdu Speaking	Punjab	Others
1965	-	-	-	-	4	9	1
1966	-	-	-	-	3	9	1
1967	1	-	-	-	3	8	-
1968	1	-	-	-	2	7	-
1969	1	-	-	1	2	7	-
1970	1	1		2	-	5	-
Total	4	1	Nil	3	14	45	2

Source: *Sayeed, 1980, p. 7.*

The use of an all-powerful looking bureaucracy as a machine to prolong and administer the rule of one man increased the sense of under representation to such an extent that later steps to correct the state could not get the confidence of the public and the sense that underrepresentation in the bureaucracy left no room for the Bengalis to participate in the power structure both at the centre and in the province⁵³ could not be dissolved.

Conclusion

The success of Bengali Movement was not the result of bureaucracy's institutional failure. In contrast it was the

consequence of bankruptcy of the leadership. The bureaucracy cannot be blamed because since Pakistan's birth to its split in 1971, notwithstanding some former bureaucrats ascended to the higher governmental positions, bureaucracy being institution did not govern Pakistan to the extent that it might contribute in the ills of the state. All the wrong doings for which bureaucracy can be labelled as the responsible of destruction, for example the institutional suppression or operation and the misrepresentation of the Bengalis in the institutional, were the faults of some individuals who delayed or ignored the right steps on the right time.

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