

Local-Bodies or Local Biradari System: An Analysis of the Role of Biradarries in the Local Bodies System of the Punjab

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Abstract

The local government is the drill of democracy at the lower level, and this is the source of political education. In developing countries like Pakistan these institutions work as a power show of local groups/biradarries (clans, fraternity). Here an attempt is made to present a general view of such elements which resist change in local bodies system, with appropriate examples from different districts of Punjab and biradari influence on this system. Such a study can provide a preliminary base to extend the boundaries of local government's politics and a diminutive detail on the role of biradarries in local bodies system. Historical, analytical and comparative approach is adopted in this discourse. The study of voting behaviour has been observed under Behavioural Approach.

Contextual Analysis

According to U.N.O., local government is such an organization that is set up through proper channels. It has an authority of levying taxes and so on, and this organization is set up with the local-bodies election. De Tocqueville, French scholar, observes the local assemblies of citizens which constitute the strength of free nation. A nation may establish a system of free

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government, but without the spirit of municipal institution it cannot have the spirit of liberty.¹ Laski says, “we cannot realize the full benefit of democratic government unless we begin by the admission that all problems are not central problems, and that the results of problems; not central in their incidence, require decision at the place and by the persons, where and by whom the incidence is most deeply felt.”² It is commonly argued that ‘primordial’ group identities such as family, kinship and caste, or membership in a village faction, play a more important role in determining voting behaviour in the sub-continent, than individual political preferences.³ The offspring of one grand parent belongs to the same caste and the collection of castes is called “*biradari*” (literally ‘brotherhood’).⁴

Historical Background

Like other countries, the local government had been set up in the sub-continent by the central government. It began in sub-continent in the English era. But, this was present in the shape of *Panchayat* in the era of Vedas (1000 B.C.). *Panchayat* is an old institution in the sub-continent comprising on a body of supreme authority (elder men) of villagers, those were responsible for collection of revenues, adjudication of all disputes, and maintenance of law and order in the community. Later in the Mughal era *Panchayat* was also institution for cases concerning financial matters, religious affairs and other general cases, the *Panchayat*, would make the ruling⁵. This system is the ancient shape of democracy. The district administration has derived in character from Muslim’s Revenue Administration of India established by Sher Shah Suri (1529-45). He divided his empire

1 Azam Ch., *Local Governments* (Karachi: Tahir Sons, 1994), p.7.

2 Muhammad Asif Malik, *Local Self Government in Pakistan* (Lahore: Publishers Emporium, 2006), p.16.

3 Andrew R. Wilder, *The Pakistani Voter: Electoral Politics and Voting Behaviour in The Punjab* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1999).

4 Mughees Ahmed, “Caste system in the Sub-Continent”, in *Al-Siyasa – A Journal of Politics, Society and Culture – Issue No.IX, Summer 2006*, Lahore, p.30.

5 P. Saran, *The Provincial Government of the Mughals 1526-1658* (Allahabad: Kitabistan, 1941), pp. 246-52.

into 47 divisions or Sarkars.⁶ In districts there were four officials in Mughal era, namely the *Faujadar*, the *Amal Guzar*, the *Bitikchi* and the *Khazandar*.⁷ Districts were further divided into the *perganans* there were further officials namely the *Shikdar*, the *Munsif* or *Amil*, the *Fotadar*, and the *Qanungo*.⁸ Under the British, local system was introduced in Lahore in 1850. In 1882, the system of Lord Ripon in which he said that the councils would prove as the school of democracy, it began stronger properly.⁹ The local bodies system remained stronger on round basis.

After the creation of Pakistan, Ayub introduced a comprehensive scheme of local self-government popularly known as Basic Democracies. Local institutions are sub-units at the public level to which the government gives some authority so that, they may be able to solve local problems with local resources. The scheme was enforced through a detailed law known as Basic Democracies Order, 1959 with effect from 27th October, 1959 in Pakistan in the shape of basic democracy.¹⁰ In the election of 1959, 1962 and 1965, the National Assembly was chosen by the members of basic democracy. The leader of District council was Deputy Commissioner at that time. In 1979, 1983, 1987 and 1991 chairman district council was head of local government. Local Bodies were not encouraged during Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's era (1973 to 1977) The proposed elections to be held under the People's Local Government Ordinance of 1975 promulgated by Pakistan's first democratically elected government and which meant to elect town and municipal committees (as well as councils in the rural area), were never held.¹¹

6 Sultan Ahmed, *Public Administration: With Special Reference to Pakistan* (Lahore: Famous Books 1997), p.339.

7 Ashirbadi Lal Srivastava, *The Mughal Empire 1526-1803*, (S.L. Agarwala, 1966, Original from the University of California), pp.196-97.

8 *Ibid.*, pp.197-98.

9 Sultan Ahmed, *Public Administration*, pp.44-45.

10 Hamid Khan, *Constitutional and Political History of Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2005), p.132.

11 *About Local Government in Pakistan*, Government of Sindh, Local Government Department, www.lgdsindh.com.pk/history.htm, Internet; accessed 3rd January, 2010

District Nazims have been working as head of district government and Naib Nazim (deputy) as speaker of district assemblies since 2001. In Pakistan, local groups in the shape of *biradarries* take part in local bodies' elections and are more active than political parties. The reason is that local bodies' elections are held on non-party basis. In 1985, general elections were held on non-party basis and the majority of the members of Provincial Assembly were from local bodies.

An Appraisal of Local Bodies in the Punjab

The dominating ideology in a society has always been an important determinant in determining the nature of the political system at national as well as at local levels.¹² Local Bodies had been hijacked by local *biradarries* and Nazims linked to majority *biradarries*. These ties became very important during general elections and influenced the results of contests at local level. Andrew Wilder opines on local bodies and its role:

The 1985 National and Provincial Assemblies elections demonstrated that local body politics had become the entry point into provincial and national politics. According to one press account 124 of the 240 members elected to the Punjab Provincial Assembly were sitting members of local body. This had two important consequences. First, it meant that provincial and national politics began to resemble local body politics. Patronage politics became the order of the day, and representing personal and constituent interests became much more important for legislators than representing national interests. The second important consequence was that this put the PPP, which had not actively participated in local body politics, at a severe disadvantage.¹³

The social system of the Punjab is characterized by a dominant caste system or *biradarism*. It impacts the political system at national as well as local levels. Zia's policies made it stronger. One of General Zia's most durable political legacies, and perhaps the one that has been the most harmful to the political parties, was the 'localization of politics'. This shifted political attention away from national politics. Local identities and local issues became the substance of the Punjab politics. Political

12 I.A. Chaudhary, *A General Review of Dynamics of Change in Centre-Local Relations*, Research Paper, *Journal of Research*, Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan, (1995).

13 Wilder, *The Pakistani Voter*, p.133.

loyalties were increasingly determined by family, faction, and *biradari* ties, and political power was determined by the amount of patronage at one's disposal. A class system of 'machine politics' developed where politics consisted not of formulating and implementing public policies or concerning oneself with the national interest, but in assisting constituents with *thana*, *katcheri* (police station and court house) problems, introducing local community development schemes, and in doling out patronage in the form of government jobs, welfare funds, contracts, licenses, loans, and land. Zia's strategy of diverting political energy from national to local issues had the intended effect.¹⁴

In Pakistan political parties except Muslim League (N or Q) have not been taking interest in local bodies' election but in 2002 elections they contested in groups with different names. (Jamiat Islami (*Ihtsaab* group), PML-N (Quaid-i-Azam group), PML-HK (Istehkam-e-Pakistan group), Pakistan Awami Tehreek (Awam group), Tehreek-Insaf (Insaf group), Millat Party (Sher Dad group) and more than 80 % local candidates male and female belonged directly to the political parties and their identity on local basis was related to their political party. This is why the government could not get success in keeping the political factors away from the local bodies. The local *biradaris* are the real power than the political parties. In a real sense the local *biradaris* have absorbed the political parties. There are different points of view about formation of local bodies. According to Andrew Heywood, a public body is staffed by appointees rather than politicians or civil servants¹⁵. Ian Mclean writes that 'In United States, a mayor is most frequently separately elected as the political leader of a council. In smaller US cities the mayor is a figurehead and the city is run by an unelected 'city manager'. In Britain, councilors are commonly members of a party group. The majority party's leader became the chair of the council.¹⁶

Local groups became active and participated as a representative of political parties during general elections and local

14 Wilder, *The Pakistani Voter*, p.131.

15 Andrew Heywood, *Politics* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1997), p.130.

16 Ian Mclean, *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p.291.

dominating *biradaries*' groups are remarkable in those groups. In the US, the situation is similar but National or the State intervention is minimal and local groups are not sectional groups. These interest groups play role in interest articulation and local politics as well. One of the reasons behind this is the presence of dominant interest groups which dilute the hostility between the two parties. These groups are more active and effective than the political parties.¹⁷ International Crisis Group comments in its report on Musharraf's Devolution of Power Plan and role of caste/tribal (*Biradari*) in these words:

Under the Devolution of Power Plan announced in August 2000, local governments were to be elected on a non-party basis ... The reforms, far from enhancing democracy, have strengthened military rule and may actually raise the risks of internal conflict ... Musharraf's scheme ostensibly aimed at establishing the foundations of genuine local democracy. However, the main rationale for devolution was and remains regime legitimacy and survival. Aside from the widespread allegations of rigging and manipulation that have shadowed them, the non-partisan nature of the local elections has exacerbated ethnic, caste and tribal divisions and undermined the organisational coherence of political parties.¹⁸

The Provincial governments also interfered in the elections of District Nazims. These seats of Nazims are distributed between major *biradaries* on the basis of their majority in the district. In some instances, candidate nominated/supported by provincial government gained success with the help of major *biradaries*. The District Nazims are local politicians and some times they preferred to become district head than the members of national/provincial assemblies.¹⁹ These are mostly current or former members of National assembly/Provincial assembly. Candidates cannot come out of the *biradari* sphere from the catalogue of candidates to the victory. The hustle and bustle is enhanced in *biradari* dwellings with the election results. A common man begins to take interest in

17 Heywood, *Politics*, p.130.

18 *Devolution in Pakistan: Reform or Regression*, International Crisis Group, Asia Report N°77. 22 March 2004, p.i.
<http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=2549&l=1>; internet accessed on 29 December, 2009

19 Interview by the author during field survey. Raja Riaz Ahmed was candidate for District Nazim in 2005. Muhammad Afzal Sahi, former Speaker, District Assembly and Punjab Assembly and M. Ashfaq, District Nazim, Toba Tek Singh.

the counting of *biradaries* votes, after the commencement of the battle of vote counting. The personality or ideologies are snubbed because of relationship with *biradari*; and the members of every *biradari* gather instantaneously or somewhat latter, in the tent of their *biradari*'s head. Whether the candidate is of district chairman Faisalabad or Toba Tek Singh, *biradari* majority is shown to the common lot and the newspapers. The election alliances are made among the major and the minor *biradaries*. The central point of the election campaign seems *biradarism*. Candidates contest in groups and panel. If the candidate of District Nazim belongs to major *biradari* the Naib Nazim will be from second largest *biradari* and this tendency fluctuates district to district. Though these alliances have no ideological base but nevertheless succeed. The loss or victory in the elections is considered the loss or victory of *biradari*. The victory or defeat of *biradari* is made the topic for discussion in the government and semi-government institutions of the region; and the discussion is to be continued on the hidden realities of the election campaign for months. The defeat or victory in the election is considered the action and behaviour of *biradari*, instead, of action and behaviour of an individual. Some or the other *biradari* is claimed as the cause of defeat. In the matter of success of the alien group, instead of giving thanks to the allied *biradari*, to call their success as a blessing of God; to create the cause of maintaining *biradari* conflict and to give the concept of thanklessness is often seen.

The deep-rooted impacts of *biradarism* are seen in the headship of institutions, new recruitments and appointment in important offices. The greetings from *biradaries* and feasts in the pleasure of success become usual. *Biradari* ties encircled the successful candidate, so even if he wanted to get out of this circle, he cannot do so. The recruitments, promotion or transfer of local officials are counted in the positive aspect of his own *biradari* and in the negative aspect of the rival *biradari*. As though, every administrative decision is analyzed in the light of *biradarism*. Those elected with support of an ethnic group and a *Biradari* will consider employment, construct roads, streets and schools for their own group.²⁰ The role of idle fellows is very prominent in this

20 Dawn, August 2, 2005.

case. They pretended to be busy and secure their interests on the basis of *biradrism* in Pakistan in general. This affects the Standard of recruitment. That is why, these impacts are seen obviously.

Statement showing *Biradari* positions in last two local bodies' elections

Table 1

District	Nazim 2001	<i>Biradari</i>	Nazim 2005	<i>Biradari</i>
Lahore	Amer Mehmood	Arain	Amer Mehmood	Arain
Sheikhopura	Tawaqalullah Virk	Jat	Jaleel Sharaquri	Arain
Qasoor	Rana Imtiaz	Rajput	Rana Imtiaz	Rajput
Okarra	Sajjad Haider Kirmani	Syed	Asad Ali Ghilani	Syed
Gujranwala	Fiaz Chattha	Jat	Fiaz Chattha	Jat
Gujrat	Ch.Shafaat Husain	Jat	Ch.Shafaat Husain	Jat
Sialkot	Naeem Javaed	Arain	Akmal Cheema	Jat
Mandi Bahauddin	Nazar M Gondal	Jat	Riaz Asghar	Jat
Hafizabad	Ali Ahmed Awan	Awan	Mubashar Bhatti	Rajput
Narowal	Javed Safdar Kahlon	Jat	Dr.Naimatullah Javed	Gujjar
Rawalpindi	Tariq Kiani	Rajput	Raja Javed Akhlaas	Rajput
Attock	Tahir Sadiq	Rajput	Tahir Sadiq	Rajput
Chakwal	Ghulam Abbas	Rajput	Ghulam Abbas	Rajput
Sargodha	Amjad Noon	Rajput	Inamul Haq	Sheikh
Khushab	Ahsaanullah Tawana	Rajput	Ghulam Muhammed	Rajput
Mianwali	Umer Hayat	Pathan	Umer Hayat	Pathan
Bhakkar	Hamid Akbar Nawani	Baloch	Hamid Akbar Nawani	Baloch
Faisalabad	Ch. Zahid Nazir	Arain	Rana Zahid Tousif	Rajput
T.T. Singh	Ch. Ashfaq	Arain	Ch. Abdul Sattar	Arain
Jhang	Hamid Sultan	Awan	Hamid Sultan	Awan
Multan	Riaz Qureshi	Syed	Faisal Mukhtar	Sheikh
Khanewal	Ahmed Yar Hiraj	J/ R	Ahmed Yar Hiraj	J/R *
Pakpattan	Amjad Joya	J/R	Rao Naseem Hashim	Rajput
Lodharan	Abdulrahman Kanjo	J/R	Abdulrahman	J/R

			Kanjo	
Sahiwal	Rai Hassan Nawaz	Rajput	Rai Hassan Nawaz	Rajput
Vehari	Mumtaz Khan Khichi	J/R	Syed Shahid Mehdi	Syed
Bahawalpur	Tariq Bashir Cheema	Jat	Tariq Bashir Cheema	Jat
Bahawalnagar	Ali Akbar Vainse	Jat	Mian Mumtaz Matiana	Rajput
Rahimyar Khan	Ahmed Mehmood	Syed	Rafiq Laghari	Baloch
Jhelum	Ch. Farrukh Altaf	Jat	Ch. Farrukh Altaf	Jat
Layyah	Shahadatdin Sehr	Rajput	Ghulam Haider Thind	Jat
D.G. Khan	Jamal Khan Laghari	Baloch	Maqsud Ahmed Laghari	Baloch
Rajanpur	Hafeez Rahman Darashik	Baloch	Raza Khan Darashik	Baloch
Muzafargarrah	Sultan Hinjra	Jat	Abdul Qayyum Jatoi	Baloch

Source. Daily *Jang*, 16th September 2005

* J/R indicates Jatt and Rajput. These *biradaries* are found both in Jatts and Rajputs.

Table-1 is showing the strength and dominating appearance of *biradaries*. In Northern Punjab, Rajput *biradari* looks dominant. Jatts are in majority in Central Punjab and also sharing in southern Punjab. Arains are sharing in Central Punjab while Balochs are dominating in southern Punjab.

The local bodies' elections are held primarily on *biradari* basis, so, local *biradaries* decide the candidate, then the election campaign begins and collective efforts become the cause of success. After the local bodies' election, the real contest is for the Chairman District Council (District Nazim) and the provincial government is also indulged in it; this is why, the common man knows already who will succeed. But, occasionally, the result is taken out quite opposite. The local bodies' institutions highlight the influences of *biradarism*. Ch. Ashfaq District Nazim (2004) Toba Tek Sing said in his interview that the impacts of *biradarism* were also present in the election of District Nazim and the pressure

of which remained on the latter matters²¹. Muhammad Azam Chaudhary's (1994) result, with the reference of Loshen Wolf's book "*The Life of Rippon*" is that "the election of municipal administrator added fuel to fire to the racial prejudices"²² is true now-a-days.

During the Martial Law regimes, it was felt necessary to introduce local government institutions in the country. Local bodies schemes are introduced to rural development programme.²³ The military intervention weakened the political system at national and at local level as well. Local bodies are regarded as the backbone of a democratic order. Zia, who was averse to elections otherwise, relied heavily on local bodies elections to introduce a new cadre of leadership throughout Pakistan and succeeded largely in this attempt".²⁴

Members of Parliament also interfere in the elections of District Nazims. They support their relatives even if it is against the policy of their political party. The ruling party supports the candidates openly but opposition is checked. Manzoor Chandio writes, "District Nazims were removed on the plea that they would use their influence in the election but the opposition alleges that government resources are being used in the election campaign by ministers, advisers and leaders of the parties in the ruling coalition."²⁵ Punjabi politics can be divided into urban and rural politics. Trend of people in cities is different from rural areas. Messon draws a picture about this trend in these words, "People in the countryside think in terms of *Biradaris* (tribes and clans); those in urban areas stick to sectarian and ethnic identities. There are also people who view the world divided on religious lines. The problem arises when the state fails to strike a balance and plays a role in imposing value system of the one on the other."²⁶ After the result of the contest the common member of succeeded *biradari* is

21 Ch. Muhammad Ashfaq, Distt. Nazim, Toba Tek Singh, Interview by author on 14th August, 2004.

22 Choudhary, *Local Governments*, p.46.

23 Malik, *Local Self Government in Pakistan*, p.338.

24 Khan, *Constitutional and Political History of Pakistan*, p.443.

25 *Dawn*, August 2, 2005.

26 *The News*, January 6, 2006.

congratulated, though he was not the integral part of the election campaign, but he takes part in the role of *biradari* in the routine matters. Voters cast their vote to their own *biradari*. They involve themselves totally in election campaign and they play their role even as candidate. They contest for victory of their *biradari* not for individual. Tahsil Nazim Chak Jhumra (Faisalabad) Fawad Ahmad Cheema (2006) told in this context that the candidates took the help of *biradari*, because they wanted to succeed. He used every method for gaining success and the weapon of *biradari* is also used for success and on the other hand, the voters or councilors cast their votes voluntarily to their own *biradari*.²⁷ Rootless democracy promoted clans politics and local bodies system made it stronger. If sectarianism and ethnocentric politics are a legacy of General Zia, the era of General Musharraf will be remembered for elections without contest.²⁸

Conclusion and Recommendations:

The focal concern of this study has been the rationalization of the role of *biradari* in local bodies' politics in Punjab. It is concluded that local bodies' politics in actual fact is *biradari* politics and with the process of local bodies system it is playing vital role. The voting has caused grave rifts within civil society by stirring up the tribal feuds and *biradarism*. People are already thinking of how to push forward their families and clans in the next election. For a person to win, he better belong to a dominant '*biradari*'. Every political party had nominated candidates belonging to larger clans, is very near to the result of this study. It is human nature to exercise ethnic preference for their own group in the form of aggression against others. Some advantages are also found in the study. *Biradarism* assumes the status of the central character in the local bodies' elections. It fills the gap of political parties. It is a type of contest which is essential feature of democracy. In Pakistan the *biradari* system provides security and power for millions of its members. It gives them an identity because *biradari* is not just a matter of being a Jatt or a Rajput, it is also a kinship system. The

27 Fawad Ahmad Cheema, (Tahsil Nazim Chak Jhumra, Faisalabad), Interview by author on 13th August, 2006.

28 *Dawn*, August 2, 2005.

system provides a wider support group than a family: a group which has a social life in which all its members participate. This tendency should be prevalent within the boundaries of social system rather than political system. In short Ayub's basic democracy, Zia's rootless democracy promoted *biradarism* and by holding party-less local body elections, politics based on ethnicity and *Biradarism* has been given chance. The local body policies of the Ayub's regime which was basic democracies, like wise Zia's 'rootless democracy' and Musharraf's 'devolution plan' has not been practiced with factual sagacity except the promotion of *biradarism*. Political awareness should be necessitated by the ruling regimes in the social fabric of the society.

The study has engendered multifaceted proposals to stamp out unconstructive role of *biradarism* from the social fabric of the Pakistani society. The local governments, which solve the problems of the public on the local level and their system, can be checked. The constructive role of *biradarism* can be experienced through transparent and accountable national party politics. Elections of District Nazims must be held on party basis, the District Nazim should be nominated by political parties and his candidature must be announced before the elections, so that the candidates run the election campaign in the shape of ideological group not in *biradari* base. In this way an opportunity will be given to several *biradarism* to reach at the top, and *biradarism* will be discouraged to some extent and its advantage will be for the common lot not for the particular class. The people think that the District Nazim can solve their little problems like minor job, access to the higher authorities and if the Nazim is of their own *biradari*, the task will become easy to solve, but it will be the hindrance in the way of opponent *biradari*. There is a great need to wipe out such doubts and apprehensions. Political parties must allow participating in local bodies' elections. Chairman should be a local political leader belonging to any political party. Political participation at local level can promote grass root politics. This tendency will help to fill the political leadership gap. Thus there is a need to bridge the fissure of political leadership. The role of political parties in rural area is very crucial to promote democratic values in the country. Political education policy is required to initiate from grass root level which is lacking in the Pakistani society. The political awareness will ultimately lead to the prevalence of transparent and accountable local bodies system.