

Qno: 7 Discuss in detail the development of local-self governments in Pakistan.

ANSWER

① INTRODUCTION:

The local government system aims to bring governance to the grassroots level. The three-tiered government structure (federal, provincial, local) is aimed to provide a speedy justice, bridge the urban-rural divide, and involve the locals in decision-making processes. However, the LGS system has not developed as a political necessity due to some historical and contemporary reluctance to devolve power from top to bottom. The provincial elites (both political and bureaucratic) fear dilution of their sovereignty in the face of a strong LG system. However, a financially, administratively, and politically empowered municipal system with devolved duties could spur socio-economic

development, without encroaching on provincial purview.

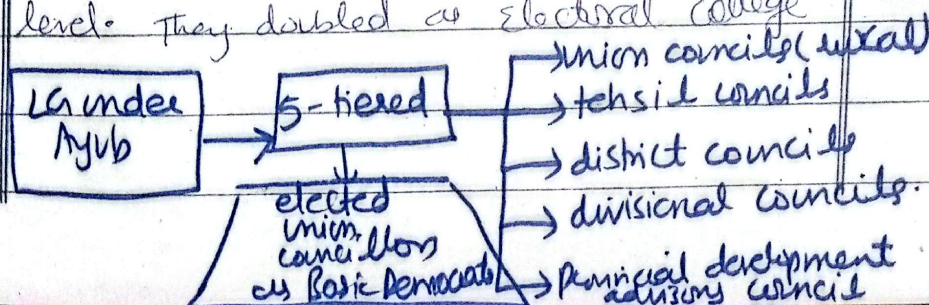
② Evolution of LG System in Pakistan

(i) Local Government's Colonial Legacy

Pakistan inherited a local government structure without a centralized governance. Municipal boards and district boards used to collect revenues and maintain law and order through local notables. Therefore, their intention was not noble, though maintained CIVIL ISSUES without democracy.

(ii) Ayub's Basic Democracies System (1959-70)

It was the first structured local government system in Pakistan. 80,000 Basic Democrats were elected at the union level. They doubled as electoral college

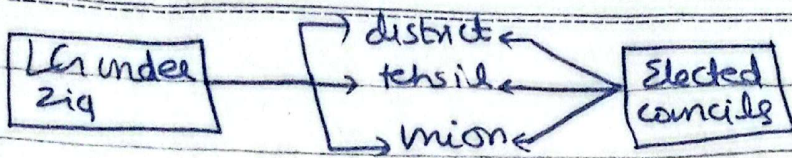


for president, National, and provincial assemblies. Ayub passed the Basic Democracies Ordinance 1959 to consolidate his political power by creating a facade of popular support for himself.

"Ayub legitimized his rule through 'controlled democracy.'"

(iii) Bhutto and Zia Era (1970s-1988)

Successive governments did not prioritize devolution and local bodies remained weak and under provincial bureaucracies. Bhutto dissolved Ayub's Basic Democracies and introduced People's Local Govt. Ordinance (1972) under provincial control. Unlike Bhutto, Zia held non-party LG elections (1979, 1983, 1987) to bypass political parties. While Bhutto brought LG under bureaucracy and provincial ministers with party-based elections in Punjab and Sindh.



CIV) LG under Civilian Governments

Both Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif promised devolution but failed to hold LG elections regularly. Provinces controlled municipal authorities (CDA, KDA, LDA) → sidelining local councils. LG became non-functional as provincial governments preferred bureaucratic control. LGs could strengthen rival parties in districts.

"Bureaucracy-managed municipal affairs has always ^{been} a safer, controlled alternative for grassroots empowerment." — Manjoor chandio

(V) Musharraf's Devolution Plan

Musharraf bypassed the federating units who are the de jure creators of federation. His devolution plan at the local

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level. District governments, appointed by the Generals, could override provincial governments. Even education and revenue, the purview of provincial authorities, were handed to his loyalists in the districts. Many thousands of seats were ~~dis~~contested to prevent his opponents from participating in the polls.

"Many women seats (48%) and labor seats (65.4%) remain uncontested, 'exposing a sham democracy' — Sule Malkani

Cvi) Post-18th Amendment

After the 18th Amendment in 2010, the local body system has become a provincial subject. However, provincial authorities have been wary of power dilution due to elected representatives.

This is a violation of Article 140-A which bounds the provincial ministers to cede legislative, administrative and fiscal powers to local body system.

(a) No clear Demarcation of Provincial and Local Administration Jurisdictions

The Constitution does not explain the specific powers for local governments. This was left to provinces to devolve powers in light of evolving ^{or} changing political realities. Local government authority varies widely across provinces, lacking both consistency and clarity.

(b) De facto Provincial Domination

The uneasy nexus between provincial chief ministers and unelected deputy commissioners has stalled devolution at the provincial level. The local committees had never been empowered and the powers of Local government has been dissolved time and again at provincial will.

"Local bodies operate as deconcentrated units of the provincial bureaucracy, not independent units." — Yasir Ali

(C) Delayed LG Elections

LG elections were frequently postponed by provinces at the last moment, to disrupt polls of local bodies.

Since provincial authorities fear dilution of their centralized authority, LG system has been made dysfunctional in spirit.

"SCP has failed to conduct local government elections in 90 days" — Dr. Kames Ingole

(D) Structural and Fiscal Barriers

Despite 18th Amendment and NFC award shifting more resources to provinces,

local governments remained financially weak.

There is no institutionalized

Provincial Finance Commission to devolve

financial autonomy to the local governments.

Also, there is no financial incentive for

provinces to strengthen local revenue

systems as population-based distribution

(82%) overweighs tax efforts (5%).

"Sindh is without a ^{new} provincial
Finance Commission for last 17
^{since 2002}
years" — Nareer Memom

Critical Analysis

While other ^{local governments} ~~provinces~~ heavily rely on
provincial transfers, Sindh uses OZT
(Octroi Zilla Tax) to fund Union Councils.

Despite increase in their budget, most of
the allocation goes to salaries and pensions,
leaving less for social development goals.

The existing PFCs are not updated,
relying on outdated fiscal transfers. Also village
committees should be strengthened, not mirs, pirs, and
waderas in local areas.

Conclusion

Thus, it could be concluded that local bodies historically
had been hijacked by provincial governments
and bureaucratic elites to maintain the
pretense of democracy. Also, provinces are
reluctant to share power to their political
rivals, which further complicates the matter.

Thus, the evolution of LG system has remained
stuck with no real devolution of power to
local bodies.