Local Governance and Empowerment of marginalized Groups: A case Study of BDS and LSG in Pakistan

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Abstract:
Inclusion and Empowerment of marginalized are considered as pre-requisite of good governance and successful operations of democracy. It is an established fact that weaker section of society, refugees in result of 1947 migration, settlers, minorities and women are pushed to marginalized group by traditional socio-political culture. They are suffering from the social, political and economic marginalization. The issue to empower the marginalized is getting consideration of intelligentsia and forces of democracy. The hypothesis of the study is that local government can be used as an important tool to empower the marginalized. This gross root level study is based on primary data, interviews and direct observations. This study evaluates the role of BDS and LSG in creating inclusive society and empowering the marginalized groups in case of Pakistan.

Keywords: Local Governance; Democracy; Empowerment; Marginalize; Pakistan

I. Introduction
Empowerment of marginalized is the most recent approach in the inclusive governance and participatory democracy. This approach aims to empower people through greater participation and self-reliance. It questions some of the fundamental assumptions concerning the interrelationship between power and development. It seeks to identify those who are powerless in terms of degree of domination by others over them and also in term of their capacity to increase self reliance and internal strength. It identifies the right of people to determine their choices in life and influence the direction of change through their ability to gain control over crucial material and non material resources. People are the main actors in development process and only their empowerment in socio-economic and political fields can bring about the desired results (Khanal 2005, p.9). Local government is operating as an agent of politico, economic and social development. This article is designed to evaluate the role of local government to empower the marginalized.

II. Power and empowerment
Scholars of social sciences, define power as an influence and control. It is often related to our ability to make others to do what we want. Weber (1946) expressed other important aspect of power that it exists within the context of relationship between people or things.
Neither power exists in isolation nor does it inherit in individual. Power is created in relationship, so, it is essential to establish a balanced relationship between power operators. Power is understood inversely by people who enjoy various positions in power structure. Similarly, it is explained by various authors in their own style. Brookman & Morgen (1984) discussed the view of members of grass root organization, Nicola & Chandler (1984) racial and ethnic group. According to Kreisberg (1992) even individual in families bring into focus the other aspect of power that is characterized by collaboration, sharing and mutuality. This aspect of power indicates that power means to strengthen the power of others rather than diminishing the others. Kreisberg (1992-57) defines it as “capacity to implement”. These definitions and explanations indicate that power mean domination, authority, influence and shared power. This demands power sharing of all segment of society in politico-social and economic decisions.

III. Empowerment

Empowerment is a connotative term, its meanings, definition and perspectives vary from subject to subject and phenomenon to phenomenon. Politics, Community development, Psychology, Education, Economics and Sociology defines it according to their subject need. Therefore, defining the concept of empowerment is subject of debate. Baily (1992) has elaborated a very relaxed definition that empowerment can be precisely defined within our project and programs, according to the people and context of program. However, empowerment is a multi-dimensional process which fosters power in people, groups and organizations to exercise in their communities, their societies and government operations, on those issues which they feel important. The empowerment of marginalized is to bring change in individuals to enable them to become partner in solving the complex issues of socio-political and economic aspects of life facing the society. This empowerment of marginalized will be based on mutual respect, diverse perspective, developing vision and work requisite for successful and stable politico-social and economic system. Reformers and policy makers suggested a number of techniques to empower the marginalized, local government system is the best tool to construct inclusive society. In case of Pakistan, Local Government is functioning since 1947 in various styles and shapes. There is a need to evaluate the role of Local Self-Government System in Pakistan as a tool to empower the marginalized groups and deprived communities.

IV. Empowerment of marginalized and Local Government

Power is a basic concept in study of politics. Those who have power can play significant role in state operations and can tilt the situation in favour of them. Conversely, the powerless groups are marginalized and deprived of benefits. Pakistan is confronting with the problem of social exclusion. This is not a new disease. One can find its root in the Hindu Caste System. Later on, this caste system was retained in some or other ways by the respective rulers to maximize their exploitations. It is pertinent to mention that those systems were comprised by King and subjects (Reayay). This society was based on exclusive political culture which was supported by socio-political traditions and superstitious beliefs. Inclusive society was neither demand nor need of that time. New ideologies democracy, utilitarianism and communism sprang up. Consequently, the foundation of modern political inclusive culture was laid down. British ruled India, during the time a modern west oriented class emerged and this emerging class along with freedom fighters forced British to introduce democratic reforms. These reforms provided limited participation to elite classes through local government system. Obviously their
objectives were to strengthen their rule and maximize their profits by exploiting the market and raw material of this region rather than empowering the marginalized. Consequently, these institutions neither could create inclusive society nor could empower the marginalized. According to the system only qualified voters were entitled to vote these were land lords, taxpayers and educated people, representing the elite class of the society, while, marginalized and weaker sections of society were neglected. Political and financial powers were granted at minimal level. Financial powers were retained by the government and were exercised by the government through governmental functionaries. The members were not even entitled to discuss. The marginalized was not eligible to purchase land. Governmental lands were given on lease rather than transfer. The system recruited and trained elite class in politics with specific psychology. More groups and individuals pushed toward marginalized. A successful movement was launched with slogan of political, economic and religious rights. Resultantly two independent states emerged at the map of world. People of both states expected a lot, but they confronted with different realities. Marginalized are still in bad condition in both the countries like other South Asian and developing nations.

Pakistan adopted 1935 act with amending it according to its requirement with the title of interim constitution. The Constituent Assembly formulated and proclaimed the first formal constitution in 1956. The leadership provided provisions to uplift the marginalized. But this parliamentary system could not survive and was hampered by military and civil bureaucracy from time to time up to date. However, the local government system got special importance during these regimes. The major objective of local government system is to empower people through greater participation and decentralization. This institution performs the function of political awareness, political socialization, political recruitment, interest articulation and ensures effective participation of local people at local level. The importance of the institution is enhanced when political parties are not performing these functions in effective manners. Union Council a “little government” provided opportunity to marginalized to participate in elections in small constituency by spending small amount and by mobilizing their communities at grassroots level. The system also provided space to marginalized sections of society by reserving seats for minorities, women, laborers and peasants. Reynolds (1999-547) of the views that the process of women empowerment started when New Zealand offered franchise to women with the introduction of modern liberal democracy in 1893. It is perceived that New Zealand was the first which institutionally open up the public sphere to both men and women, a sphere that for hundreds, if not thousands, of years had been the monopoly of patriarchal heads of the family in all business, almost in every part of the globe. After century of slow, incremental gains for women in politics, the results are mixed. Women are involving them selves in grassroots party structure in higher numbers than ever before. The number of women is increasing gradually as parliamentarians and more cabinet portfolios are in there hand as compare to past. However, the number involved remained vastly disproportional to the importance of women and in many parts of the world the representation of women remain little more than a blip on the male political landscape. This indicates the power structure by and large of all the nations is in hands of patriarchal heads of the families. South Asia is not exception to it. In social structure from decisions of marriages, settlement and continuity of marriages were in preview of the patriarchal family head in this region. The other marginalized group is laborers (Kamy or Kamiya) in Nepal, in Pakistan and India. They were not supposed to talk about politics even about their terms and conditions. The people of agrarian societies
were more sufferers. To raise head against the decision of family head, tribe chief and feudal lord could be cause of great consequences. Briefly, the poor and women in developing world generally, and in South Asia particularly, were suffering from political, economic and cultural disempowerment. It is an established fact that empowerment of marginalized is pre-requisite of political, economic and cultural development and modernization process. State operators suggested local government institution to address the issue of marginalized.

Local Self Government got more significance in modern governance processes. It is as an agent of economic and political development. Subsequently, it has a potential to address the empowerment issue by ensuring representation, participation and including the all segments of society at grassroots level in decision making process. These little governments are operated by elected representatives of local communities so, they can preserve, develop the education, culture and traditions of diverse groups.

It is a general sense that this institution is the basic units for people’s participation. Obviously, participation provides opportunity to people to choose what is best for them. In other words, people can be a part of the discussion which affects their life. But mere participation does not fulfill the objectives of democracy. People’s participation should be supported by power and authority to discuss, decide, and implement decisions. The aim of local governance, along with others, is to empower local people and legitimize their decisions effectively.

This institution is functional in Sub-continent since Arians period. Pakistan adopted it from British rule at the time of emergence and it has been working in one or other form since then. Though, objectives, mechanism and operation varied from time to time and regime to regime. It has facilitated to break traditional power structure and activated the people to embrace modern one. The institution contributed to empower the marginalized by adopting various mechanism at gross-root level. Basic Democracy System (BDS) and Local Self Government (LSG) is evolutionary process in this regard.

V. Historical Realities

Political culture of South Asia was overwhelmed by superstitious beliefs caste system and tribal fashion in old age (Gardezi 1988). Dravidians were settled in the area they were divided in many hundred small autonomous local principalities. People were empowered to decide their political, economic and cultural issues at local level under strong tribal system. Various tribes such as Arian, Mongol, Arab, Tughlaq, Ghaoury, Saljoq, Slaves, Mughal and etc. came to India and established their systems of local governance by empowering local and indigenous elites at gross root level. These local units were autonomous and run by local tribal leaders or feudal lords appointed (an agent) by central government (Muhammad 2004). The system was centralized and tribal chiefs were sole authority to take final decision. However, the tribal chief was always considered as the one most trusted in society. The concept of empowerment of indigenous was limited to empowerment of tribal leaders (Rajas, Feudal Lords, and Tribal Chiefs). It is pertinent to mention that during that period, mode of production was agriculture, basic needs were limited, quality of life was more or less equal, and people were contended. They were bound to live united to defend them selves from beasts, external threats, and neighbor tribes etc. By nature and by political, economic and social compulsion they were happy in joint family system and under their tribal leader. Thus
empowerment of marginalized was no more any issue of general public. British established two-tier system of local governance i.e. District board and *Panchayat*. Under this system only qualified voters were entitled to vote and to be elected. In a strong tribal culture, people were contented with inclusion of their tribal leader or feudal lord in political operations. The feudal lord or tribal chief was used to enjoy some superior status in the community. Inclusion of marginalized was not at the agenda of policy makers. Therefore, according to its nature of participation local government institution was a club of feudal lords, administered, controlled and dominated by the District Magistrate. The primary objective was to maintain law and order, to ease the financial burden of the government and to play the role of mediator between government and indigenous people (Muhammad 2004). This was a time when new movements of liberalism, utilitarianism, communism, etc. were springing up in the world. Accordingly, process of political and economic transformation was taking its course. Sub-Continent was suffering from colonialism. British masters introduced modern institutions, while objectives and operations of these institutions were limited to serve the interests of their masters.

In the first half of twentieth century, the people of other Asian countries like China and USSR launched powerful ideological movements and adopted political systems to empower marginalized in their own patterns. At the same time political leaders and reformers of sub-continent, infused the spirit of freedom, equality and participatory government in people which triggered the freedom movement against British Raj. Consequently, people got freedom and two sovereign states Pakistan and India emerged on the map of world. People were expecting a lot from newly born states. So, the leadership initiated the process to modernize their political and economic institutions to empower their people to come up to their expectation.

The newly emerged state of Pakistan confronted with various political, financial and social problems. Most of them were created by the hasty and injudicious decisions of Lord Mount Batten’s government with the association of the then Indian National Congress. The early leadership made efforts to meet the challenges but untimely death of father of the nation (Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Quaid-e-Azam) hampered the efforts and aggravated problems. Like other institutions the then government adopted the existing Local Board System with the same structure and functions with minor adjustments to provide local services. Political managers could not promulgate and implement constitution up to 1956 and country was run under interim constitution. Local government system also could not obtain required response of political managers. However, it worked at grassroots level to meet the day to day issues of respective areas. Local government institution passed through reform process but it is still in process of democratization in terms of consolidating and institutionalizing democratic norms and principles.

### VI. Basic Democracy System (BDS)

Political history of Pakistan reveals that introduction of BDS was the first step, which reformed, restructured and overhauled the local government system to empower the people at grass root level by introducing elections on adult franchise bases. At that time settlers, refugees, weaker sections of society, minorities and women were marginalized groups. The institution of local government was given special importance by Ayub Khan like other military rulers to empower the people at grassroots level and to work as bridge between people and authoritarian governments. Ayub Khan promulgated
The constitution of 1962 and constructed and put into operation an innovative model of local government with the name of Basic Democracy System (BDS). BDS was multifunctional institution having power to run the local government, to perform the function of Electoral College of the president, provincial assemblies and national assembly. This was four-tier structure; union council, Tehsil council, district council and divisional council in rural area. Divisional council and Tehsil councils were without financial and administrative powers. Urban areas were run separately with the nomenclature of Municipal Corporation, Municipal Committee and Town Committee. Elections on the basis of adult franchise were introduced first time which could be considered as a consequential move towards people empowerment. It provided space for lower middle class to enter in active political operations. It ensured participation to various ethnic, linguistic and racial groups in their respective areas. Kotmoman is an interesting case in this regard. It was a Union Council earlier, later on in 1965 it was elevated to the status of town committee located in tehsil Bhalwal, district Sargodha, province of Punjab. In 1960s, its population was by and large fifteen thousand, now it is the city of more than sixty thousand people. Major ethnic groups are Gondal, Luck, Rajpoot, Gujar, Araein, Sayed, local, settler etc. All were able to elect their members in local elections held time to time. Under the basic democracy system ten members were elected. The migrated community, in consequence of “migration miseries” was politically and economically marginalized in this locality. They were considered as second grade citizens in their own town. They had no say in local matters. The system provided them space and resultantly they were able to elect three members in house of ten, by and large near to proportion of their population (They were Jamil Ahmad, Munshi John Muhammad and Buland Khan) in local house. The case of District council Sargodha (rural) is very interesting. Sargodha is an administrative district of Punjab province, was mostly forest (jangle). British government established irrigation system. The area woven by canals was divided in small Chaks and Land was allotted to various people under different schemes. The people migrated from Chakwal, Jehlum, and Gujarat settled in Sargodha in first half of twentieth century. They were called settlers. Those who were already residing here were called locals. Although they were enjoying good relations with each other but their culture, values and traditions were a bit different from each other. These differences lead to small distance between them. In political set up the settlers were not represented. Similarly, the people who migrated from the East Punjab were not represented in the system. Fortune and circumstances pushed them to politically marginalized groups. So, the population can be segmented in to local, settlers and migrated in 1947. It is also interesting that locals were also not included in decision making process as only few families were enjoying right of vote. The introduction of adult franchised system empowered to all communities by electing their representatives in small constituencies by mobilizing their respective communities. Results of connected union councils reflect the reality. Union Council Chak No. 11 South Choudhary Muhammad Zaman from settlers’ community was elected chairman and Union Council Chak No. 66 South Malak Muhammad Rajpoot from migrated community was elected Chairman from the Union Council of Matteela, Choudhary Anayat Haral (from Local Community) was elected chairman (Muhammad Survey 2009). It is also interesting that the chairman of district council was elected from among the locals (Saeed Qureshi). It indicates that various ethnic groups were able to elect their representative in these bodies. The money was not involved in the election, so the marginalized were able to contest and win elections by mobilizing their respective communities (Muhammad Survey 2009). Minorities were provided reserve seats. Moreover, adult franchise system empowered each and every body with vote.
Marginalized were approached by candidates for vote. Voters expected and demanded facilities for elected representatives. Local Government was recognized as an agent of community and economic development. It was able to provide schools and colleges in far-flung areas of Pakistan. District Government High School Kotmoman, Municipal Degree College Bhalwal are best example of it (Muhammad Survey district Sargodha 2009). One can find this type of educational institution in other areas of Pakistan. In urban areas local government provided strong educational network (more or less free education) to people. Later on in 1973 the central government adopted the policy of nationalization of education along with others. Resultantly, these institutions were taken over by provincial government. Health centers (hospitals and dispensaries) were also provided in rural areas and in slums in urban areas. Veterinary hospitals were also provided by local government under BDS. It is an established fact that education is an important vehicle to ensure empowerment of marginalized. The system operated at grassroots level and provided some space to marginalized (Muhammad various Studies).

Despite affirmative operations of BDS, at the same time system confronted with serious crises. It strengthened the bureaucratic autonomy. The Deputy Commissioner (DC) was remained the kingpin in the system as the chairman of the District Council. Union Council was the lowest tier of this system and its survival was depended on the grants of district council. System failed to bridge the gap between poor and rich and between rural and urban areas. Urban councils and rural councils operated separately as independent governments. The system to settle or manage common projects or issues was missing. Its multi functional nature, particularly, its function as Electoral College of election of the President, central and provincial assemblies added to its failure. It was widely criticised by intellectual community and politicians. Its position of Electoral College was misused by Ayub Khan to win the election of president. This, along with other factors triggered resentment in opposition against the system and system was rolled back with the Ayub’s fall down. However, despite the fact that the system was dominated by bureaucracy and was misused by the then president and his team, it performed the positive role to bring the marginalized in mainstream politics.

**VII. Local Self Government (LSG) 1979**

Local Self Government Ordinance 1979 instituted imperative structural, political, financial and administrative reforms in the system. This could be considered a more reformed, more refined and more democratic system, having capacity to empower the marginalized. The most important change in the system was that members of all the tiers were directly elected through adult franchise, chairman and workers/lady councilors were indirectly elected by the respective electoral colleges comprised by the elected members of the respective bodies. Political and financial powers were enhanced. This was a concrete step to local self government. Membership of bureaucracy was abolished, which reduced the bureaucratic autonomy. However, some clauses of the Act provided space to bureaucracy to remain as referee. Under this local self government system urban and rural councils enjoyed considerable autonomy. There was “two tier” structure in rural areas. The district councils were established in every administrative district to assume

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1 In system of 1979, the structure was as; Zilla Council: It was comprised of the area of a revenue district excluding its urban areas cantonment areas and federal areas. Union Council: It extends over a village or a group of villages having population of fifteen thousand.
local government functions for the area exclusive of the urban authorities (incidentally, the revenue and police district had the same boundary as that of the administrative district). In the system Punjab had 34 district councils with a total rural population of 3,42,41,000 which was more than 72 percent of the total population of the province. Each of the district council was comprised of an average area of 6040 square km., an average population of 10,07,088, an average three to four Tehsils, seventeen police stations and an average seven hundred fifty one Mozas (the smallest unit in civil administration). The cities and towns (big or small) were governed separately from their rural surroundings. In urban area, metropolitan corporation, municipal corporations, municipalities and town committees were instituted. The status was decided on the bases of population (Government of Punjab, 1994). There were eight metropolitan/municipal corporations, seventy-four municipal committees and one hundred and thirty five town committees were established in Punjab. The process contributed to empower the marginalized can be judged as follow:

i. The system of Adult franchise ensured the political participation of all segment of society. Under the elections of 1979, 83, 87, 91 and 98 the composition of Town Committee Kotmoman was as such, as various ethnic groups got their share more or less according to their population. The representation of minorities, women and weaker sections of society was ensured by reserving their seats in councils. The election process created awareness about the importance of voters and vote. People realized that they are empowered to elect or reject to anyone. Public representatives were pressurized by political culture to launch door to door campaign and visit the rich or poor in their constituencies. The author’s surveyed by involving in campaigns of elections, 1979, 1983, 1987, 1991 and 1998. It has been concluded that people were well aware about their importance and vote power. Some time it was misused by people with the slogan “vote on sale”. However, this kind of behavior was criticized by people extensively.

ii. The women are less empowered than men in political, economic and professional spheres. Traditions and institutional mechanics pushed them to less empower and marginalize. The Local Self Government Act 1979 provided space to empower women by reserving seats for them in union council and district councils in rural areas and in various houses of urban authorities. At the outset women were reluctant, or they were impeded by the cultural set up to participate in the election, but gradually they got there place and they were very much in houses and had potential to exercise their legal powers. They elevated to the chairpersons and deputy chairpersons as well. Women were elected by Electoral College comprised by elected members of respective council’s. After getting elected they were equal members of the house.

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2 Metropolis: An urban area has population exceeding twenty-five lacs will be given the status of Metropolis. Corporation: The city may comprise an urban area having a population of five lacs or more than five lacs; Municipality: It may comprise an urban area having a population of twenty thousand or more save as other wise provided or notified by the provincial government, Town Committee: This is an urban area having a population exceeding five thousand but not exceeding twenty thousand save as other wise provided or notified by the provincial government (Government of the Punjab, local Government ordinance 1979).
iii. The participation of marginalized was ensured by providing seats to workers, peasants and minorities.

iv. This system empowered the people to decide about developmental activities at grassroots level. Moreover, the system was considered (i) an agency to distribute civic services (ii) the platform for political education (iii) a medium of political and administrative decentralization (iv) an agency for carrying out economic development. Hence, Local Self Government contributed to the development of the infrastructure of economy (Government of Pakistan 1998). In particular, the physical development of the vast rural economy was carried out with the help of the local government by involving the marginalized.

v. Small electoral constituencies contributed to generate political awareness, political socialization, political recruitment and political training at grassroots level. This created sense of stakeholder among weaker section of society and empowered them.

It is interesting to note that this system operated more effectively under authoritarian regimes. It enjoyed more political and financial powers during these regimes. Following can be considered the reasons of their generosity towards this institution: (a) authoritarian regimes wanted to establish support base in lower section of the society by empowering them through grassroots level democracy, (b) to replace established political elites with new class to break the status quo, (c) Normally, military was recruited from rural areas and economically marginalized classes, while officers were recruited from middle or lower middle class. They were always inclined to break the existing power structure to make place for these classes. The system achieved the target and a new class was created, empowered and included in political process. It is not in preview of this study to gage the ulterior motives of system operators. The study reflects that the institution contributed to empower women, people of far flung area, lower classes and the lower middle classes by giving them opportunity to participate in decision making process at local level. This enabled them to identify their demands, set their priorities according to their resources. Consequently, they contributed to the balanced local development.

VIII. Conclusion

Empowerment of marginalized is at the current agenda of international political and social reformers. According to them the empowerment of marginalized is a key to inclusive democracy. While, in developing nations the situation of this segment of the society is very precarious. The study indicates that settlers, refugees of 1947, weaker sections of society, minorities and women were considered marginalized groups in Sargodha district. Although the first two groups were not included in excluded groups in the government scheme, however, they also empowered and were able to get their share by the operation of the system. It is an established fact that local government provides mechanism to empower marginalized, because, this institution operates as an agent of politico, economic and social development at grassroots level in contemporary age. In this capacity, it empowers the marginalized, no need to mention that it is essential for positive social change. Local, Self Government has been working since long in Pakistan, mentioned case study indicates that it contributed to elevate and empower the marginalized. Conversely, the analytical study indicates that Local Government confronted with serious conceptual, structural and operational crises. These crunches
hampered the empowerment process again and again. There is need to evolve “consensus mechanism” among diverse interest groups, effective governance techniques, constitutional guarantees, sustainable local government reforms for successful operations of this institution. Consolidated democracy such as development of party systems can be a basis of resolving conflict associated with empowerment and in general reforms. Structural flaws of Basic Democracy and Local self Government slowed down the empowerment process. The poor physical and expensive communication system, the paucity of newspapers, low literacy rate, and the absence of political organization in the villages, fragile financial resources had definitely hindered the process. Resultantly, empowerment process remained sluggish.

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