

*Bureaucracy and Political Parties in
Pakistan, 1947-58*
A Case Of Differing Perceptions and Ideals

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You have to do your duty as servants, you are not concerned with this political or that political party, that is not your business...It is a business of politicians to fight out their case under the present constitution or the future constitution that may be framed. You therefore, have nothing to do with this or that party. You are civil servants.¹

(Quaid-i Azam)

The two global wars not only shook the foundations of Europe but also brought an end to the colonial rule. A sense of community feeling and the growth of national consciousness led to the emergence of nationalist movements. Modern nation-states surfaced mainly as a response to colonial hegemony and largely owing to the nationalist movements that were led and guided by political parties. These parties that were in fact, mass movements with a pronounced nationalist outlook organised opposition forces against colonialism and employed mobilisation and agitation of masses as key tools for the fulfilment of their purpose. However, as freedom dawned, they proved to be inexperienced but also ill-prepared for the task of administration of the new states.

The political leadership which had mobilized the Muslim masses for a separate homeland failed to retain its position after the death of its founder, Quaid-i Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah. The Muslim League was

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1. Jamil-ud-din Ahmed, *Speeches and Writings of Mr. Jinnah* Vol.11, (Lahore: Publishers, United Limited, 1964), 502.

essentially more a movement than a regular political party.² To be more precise, it was a charismatic movement that had come to mobilize various groups and social forces rallied around the demand for Pakistan under the leadership of its Quaid. It never matured into a well-knit, disciplined political party.³ It was only the leadership of Jinnah that had the Muslim masses brought on to one platform to achieve common goal. Once the goal Pakistan — was achieved and the Quaid-i Azam was gone, the Muslim League rapidly degenerated in character and disintegrated in essence. Its leadership was assumed by predominantly western educated land owning classes who had neither much political experience nor any clear-cut political goal to pursue in the post-independence period. They had little idea of the things they were supposed to pursue in a newly born country.

The result was that the Muslim League failed to transform itself into a national party working for stability and prosperity of their country. The leaders lacked the will and commitment to develop a system that was best suited to the interests of a free nation where its people could lead their lives according to their own ideals, values and preferences instead of hanging on the old colonial system of government.⁴ As Inam-ur-Rehman states:

Brought up and bred in British parliamentary tradition in undivided India, the Muslim League leadership knew of no better system on which to model the political system of the new state of Pakistan.⁵

The model, the League had seen functioning in pre-independence India was that of bureaucratic rule un-hindered by any political control.⁶

Pakistan faced gigantic problems on its creation. Perhaps only few states started their journey with such grave handicaps, as Pakistan did.⁷ Keith Callard argues that until 1940 the Muslims had not anticipated the possibility of British rule reaching its end. The system of government for

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2. Khalid Bin Sayeed, *The Political System of Pakistan*, (Karachi: Pakistan Publishing House, 1967), 83.
 3. Huma Naz, *Bureaucratic Elites and Political Developments in Pakistan*, (Islamabad: National Institute of Pakistan Studies, 1990), 67.
 4. Khalid Bin Sayeed, *Politics in Pakistan: The Nature and Direction of Change*, (New York: Praeger, 1980), 32.
 5. Quoted in Huma, *Bureaucratic Elites*, 92.
 6. Sayeed, *The Political System*, 62
 7. *Ibid.*, 60.

the demanded state of Pakistan could not be given a serious thought because the entire leadership was busy in trying to counter the Hindu influence in the ensuing struggle for power.⁸ This situation was compounded by the problems caused by the partition. It was extremely difficult for an infant state to tackle problems like rehabilitation of refugees, paucity of administrative personnel, communal riots, hostile and intransigent attitude of India. The opportunist elements within the Muslim League making full use of disturbed internal conditions launched struggles for power through intrigues and conspiracies. They looked upward to officialdom for security as well as success. Jinnah had anticipated this long time back. As he put it.

The Muslim camp is full of those spineless people who, whatever they may say to me, will consult the Deputy Commissioner about what they should do.⁹

However, knowing the strength, usefulness, and potentially beneficial role of bureaucracy, at least in the early years, it was inevitable for Jinnah to rely heavily on the civil servants. But he did not want them to get involved in politics. He cautioned the civil servants not to support any political party. Simultaneously, he warned the political leaders to stay away from influencing the services and not to interfere with their working or use them for their ends.¹⁰ In fact, he asked the civil servants to demonstrate strength in resisting pressure from the parties.

If you want to raise the prestige and greatness of Pakistan, you must not fall a victim to any pressure, but do your duty as servants to the people and the State, fearlessly and honestly. Governments are formed, governments are defeated, Prime Ministers come and go, ministers come and go, but you stay on, and therefore, there is a very special responsibility placed on your shoulders.¹¹

In a democratic system, the legitimacy of a political leader is rooted in the support of his constituency. Therefore, he chooses to have a safe and long term constituency, something that he can rely upon, always. In the case of Pakistan, there was an inherent problem for some of the

8. Keith Callard, *Pakistan: A Political Study*, (London: Allen and Unwin, 1957), 137.

9. Ch. Muhammad Ali, *The Emergence of Pakistan*, (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1967), 372.

10. Jameel-ud-Din, *Speeches and Writings of Mr. Jinnah*, 502.

11. *Ibid.*, 528.

politicians, especially those who had migrated from the Muslim minority areas of the Indian subcontinent and had thus left their safe constituencies back in India. They had to identify and secure safe constituencies in Pakistan which was not an easy undertaking. On the other hand, there were many politicians, especially belonging to the land-owning classes who had their traditional safe areas of support. They demanded and enjoyed absolute claim to leadership only depending on their constituency. The manner they win over the support of the voters are quite well known. The poor peasant, the main constituent, totally depends on his landlord, Chief or Sardar. He depended on him whether it is for financial assistance, police cases, his family matters, loss of his cattles or anything he cares about. In turn, the landlord expects complete subordination from the peasant in all matters, including political. Thus the peasant becomes part of his political base and his vote-bank, so to speak, in the company of all workers living in that particular constituency.

But then, if the landlord had to ensure a continued and unwavering support of his followers, he needs close and responsive relations with local bureaucracy, that is, police, courts and revenue officials. As one big landlord of the Punjab put it,

In our society the arms of law are removed from where you live. It may be 20 or 30 miles away. I may be dead before I get to law. The tendency, therefore, is to gang up. If somebody stole my friends cattle, my friend is right when he bashes him up. I support my friend irrespective of the fact whether he is right or wrong. This is a sort of insurance policy for the whole group. And you vote for a leader who helps in getting one's nephew released from police lock-up.¹²

In Pakistan, therefore, one finds an unending list of politicians belonging to land-owning classes, Noons, Tiwanas, Mamdots, Qazilbashes, Meers, Hotis, Arbabs, Khans and Sardars, who exercise immense influence in their areas. This enables them to do everything to the extent to which they were in League with important tiers of bureaucracy. And this was not something new to them. They had experienced this before too, under the British. Most of these politicians could not claim traditional, aristocratic origins. Their landed interest had been created and nurtured by the British only to make them loyal to their rule. They were

12. Lawrence Ziring, Ralph Braibanti, W. Howard Wriggins, (ed), *Pakistan: The Long View*, (Durham: Durham University Press, 1977), 257.

pampered and were allowed to exploit their peasants. No lofty principles of loyalty to the state animated their political behaviour.¹³

The relationship between the bureaucracy and politicians was further influenced by unstable political governments in Pakistan. The Muslim League soon disintegrated after independence. During 1948-58 seven political parties were formed out of its fragments which produced nine highly unstable governments. The loyalties of politicians kept on shifting.¹⁴ One day they would attack the government and the next day they would accept a post in it.¹⁵

Apparently they had no principles. A case in point is Khawaja Nazim-ud-din's government which got the budget passed in March 1953 but was dismissed by Governor General Ghulam Muhammad soon after. The adherence to parliamentary practice was considered not important.¹⁶ A majority of his party accepted the Governor-General's appointee as their new leader.¹⁷ The legislature did not even bother to debate the matter of Nazimuddin's ouster. This dismissal of cabinet which went unopposed further weakened the position of politicians and political parties, so much so that within a year the Governor-General dissolved the first constituent Assembly.

Now the bureaucracy exploited the internal differences of the politicians. Even a new political party was formed at the behest of the chief executive. The formation of Republican party was one of the tactical moves by Iskander Mirza, a bureaucrat turned politician, who wanted to install those leaders who were not bound by any party discipline. The Republican party or the "King's party" enjoyed full support of the President, Iskander Mirza, and the Punjab Governor, Mushtaq Ahmad Gurmani. It established its control over the administration of west Pakistan because it was clear that no party could stay in power in the province without support at the centre. Chaudhry Muhammad Ali, another civil servant, was appointed Prime Minister. The majority of the members

13. Sayeed, *Politics in Pakistan*, 36.

14. K.K. Aziz, *Party Politics in Pakistan, 1947-58*, (Islamabad: National Commission on Historical and Cultural Research, 1976), 180.

15. Huma, *Bureaucratic Elites*, 66

16. Sayeed, *Politics in Pakistan*, 35.

17. Callard, *Pakistan: A Political Study*, 137-139.

in the National Assembly were then under the authority of a prominent member of the civil service rather than any politician.¹⁸

In order to discredit parliamentary institutions, Iskander Mirza encouraged the Republican party to retain power at any cost. When Republicans lost majority support in the central legislature, the President came to their rescue by imposing governor's rule in the province.¹⁹ It may be argued that Iskandar Mirza was doing all this to perpetuate his own rule by marginalizing the political parties. Politicians had been reduced to mere puppets. Rival groups like Noons, Qazilbashis, Gardezis and Gilanis on the one hand and Daultana group on the other was involved in intrigues against each other. They operated essentially on the basis of short-term objectives like winning an election or toppling a Ministry. After achieving their objective, they usually disintegrated.²⁰ The political rivalries brought such an acute crisis that the political system was about to be paralyzed. *The New Statesman* pointed out, "It was true that most of the politicians deserved to be stoned, but it was not for President Mirza to cast the stones".²¹ Iskander Mirza was able to do so because he not only manoeuvred the politicians but also enjoyed the full support of civil servants, the beneficiaries of his policies. Thus the bureaucracy and the political parties were not playing their respective roles that characterises a democratic system.

To understand the relationship that exists between bureaucracy and the political parties, it is imperative to ascertain the factors that determine this relationship. In undivided India bureaucracy had acted as a bridge between the rulers and the ruled, but the rise and growth of nationalist movements served to widen the gap between the British authorities and the natives. Hence, the bridge was blown up at the altar of self-interest under the garb of nationalist aspirations. The bureaucracy as a tool of colonial rule could not align itself with the nationalist movement and in most cases stayed neutral. The two institutions, i.e., the party system and bureaucracy, therefore, flourished simultaneously but their paths were nowhere destined to meet.

18. Muntaz Ahmed, *Bureaucracy and Political Development in Pakistan*, (Karachi: National Institute of Public Administration, 1974), 94.

19. Sayeed, *The Political System*, 85.

20. *Ibid.*, 87-89.

21. *Ibid.*, 91-92.

Being part of the elitist segment of the society, the bureaucrats were termed by the political leaders as haughty, arrogant and subversive to politics. The bureaucracy also, on its part, did not attach much esteem to political leaders and with suspicious overtones considered them to be agitators and trouble-shooters.²² Such a clash of interests and conflict of opinions hampered the development of institutions, both political and administrative, as independence approached.

The bureaucracy of Pakistan played a pivotal role in modernization, economic development and in establishing an administrative structure. However, they were not very supportive in the process of political development and institutionalization. They were elitist but cohesive, organized and well-disciplined. They were keen to protect status-quo and ensure law and order.

Citizen participation was least encouraged. They held firmly to their belief, long after independence, that maintenance and order to run the affairs of the state, rather than ensuring citizen participation, ought to be their ultimate goal. The bureaucrats had definite reservations regarding an alteration in this reality since in their opinion authoritarian values were not only more deeply rooted in the cultural pageant of the society but also far more developed and acceptable than democratic norms. The best training ground for a politician or political party is an election, but Pakistani leaders did not get opportunities to learn how a democratic political process works, as Pakistan never had a general election. Consequently, creation of a national political party aggregating various regional and cultural groups was not possible.²³ Since the political institutions were infant and the political leadership was inexperienced, the bureaucracy was not prepared to accept the supremacy of political parties and political leaders.

On the contrary, bureaucracy began to indulge in politics which hampered the evolution of a coherent party system. Political leaders also showed incompetence and lack of skill for the development of party system. Thus bureaucratic ambitions and incompetence of the political leaders retarded the growth of democratic norms and party system. This conflictual relationship between the party system and the bureaucracy in the initial years of Pakistan, helped bureaucracy to expand and

22. Saeed Shafqat, *Political System of Pakistan and Public Policy*, (Lahore: Progressive Publishers, 1989), 155.

23. Sayeed, *Political System*, 83.

consolidate its power. There was a corresponding relationship between the ascendancy of bureaucracy and the decline of the political parties.²⁴

The political leaders were denied access to decision making posts by the bureaucracy, which not only assumed control of such positions but also dabbled in politics of patronage.²⁵ The dilemma of leadership crisis led to decline of political parties which were already kept away from ranks of patronage and influential positions. Their disintegration, hence, was merely a matter of time.

The political parties could never assert their position as they had no experience of handling governmental affairs. They had no sound future programme and most of them had in their members land-owning class which lacked popular support base. Added to it, were the official legal restrictions that were imposed on political activities as PRODA²⁶ and the section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code.²⁷ So much so that when martial law was imposed in October 1958, Iskander Mirza, the President of Pakistan, issued the following proclamation

The mentality of the political parties has sunk so low that I am unable any longer to believe that elections will improve the present chaotic internal conditions and enable us to form a stable and strong government capable of dealing with the innumerable and complex problems facing us today.²⁸

While the bureaucracy acquired stability and strength, the government, through fear rather than consent and citizen participation, emerged as the authority in Pakistan. Citizen-participation, party development and democratic norms did not take roots. The conflict between political parties and the bureaucracy persisted. Authoritarian and autocratic rule became a generally acceptable political reality in Pakistan.

24. Shafqat, *Political System of Pakistan*, 156.

25. *Ibid.*, 130.

26. PRODA (Public and Representative Offices Disqualification Act) under which a Minister could be disqualified if found guilty of corruption and his conduct by a tribunal of Federal or High court Judges set up by government.

27. According to section 144, District Magistrates were authorized to declare any meetings or assembly as unlawful and withhold permission to organize any meetings, procession or demonstrations.

28. *The Pakistan Times*, (October 9, 1958).