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**LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN BRITISH INDIA FOR  
MASS EMPOWERMENT OR PARTICULAR AGENDA**

***Dr. Mussarat Jabeen***

*Associate Professor, Department of Political Science &  
International Relations, University of Sargodha  
Email: [mjabeenasif@yahoo.com](mailto:mjabeenasif@yahoo.com)*

**ABSTRACT**

*The study is aimed to look into the local government system in the subcontinent during the British rule. This system was already working in various parts of the country with diverse patterns, but landlords or upper strata of society were administering it. The British replaced the older one with regular system for obtaining various objectives. They claimed of the fulfillment of public needs and demands through this system, while in reality, much inclination was showed towards revenue collection and less attention was paid on service delivery. The system was helpful for the masses in some ways, but the regime preferred consolidation of power and exploitation of country's financial resources. Additionally, patronage politics was encouraged. The concept of subsidiary and share of revenues were to strengthen the center. Here is the question either the local government was introduced to encourage the people for self-governance or getting benefit for specific objectives. It is believed that the system was to amass fiscal resources as empirical evidence and published research indicated. The findings of the study reveals that local governance was in pursuit of English tradition, but actual reason was finical problem, which led to formation of local bodies. However, at later stages, the system facilitated the masses by increasing share in self-rule and these aspects have been reviewed by the study.*

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**Keywords:** British, Community, Local Governance, Panchayat, Public, Service Delivery.

**INTRODUCTION**

In subcontinent, local governments were founded under British administration to give the populace an opportunity for managing their local affairs. The purpose of the system was to provide an active participation to the citizens in process of nation-building (Muttalib, 1982). The modern democracies establish local government institutions to transmit authority at the local level, ensuring public engagement. This system provides opportunities to masses for actively contributing in official affairs. This thinking is adopted to empower

the people at lower levels of society, making them a part of power structure. According to World Bank (2000), about 95 percent of democracies have introduced this system by electing sub-national governments, which are viewed as an agency for political and socio-economic development, devolving political, economic, and administrative authority to these bodies. The objective of sharing this responsibility is to include local bodies in decision-making as they are well-aware of local issues and sensitive to the community's demand for whom their services are taken. Public participation in these bodies is for good governance.

The government operating at the district, village, and town levels is referred as Local Government (LG). In a broader term, it provides opportunity to local populace for managing local issues through representative bodies. Although these organs are essentially subsidiary, yet they are given freedom of action within a few predetermined limitations. For the sake of effective administration, this structure represents a division of authority. Being a smaller public organization, it is permitted to manage a small-sized unit, decentralizing the powers and transferring liabilities to subordinate offices (Jabeen, 2021:19). In the creation of LG, the central government retains all of its authority and merely delegated a few for better administration. Thus, it performed all types of duties within formal hierarchies, from community service to participation in different networks and sister organizations. It offers the framework for citizen interaction and state apparatus for collective decisions-making. Jackson (1965:23) defines the phrase local government as "it indicates the management of local affairs and services by popularly elected councils, even within the area administered by a council". It indicates that in the absence of municipal institutions, it is not easy to access the actual liberty and good governance at the grassroots level.

The formation of LGs is for service delivery, but at the same time, it satisfies the tax payers of local level. This body is a source of strength for higher-level of administrations, implementing their policies and enhancing their efficiency through shared responsibility. It works as nursery for creating national leadership and also provides training for higher-level institutions. Its platform offers opportunity to display leadership qualities. The experience of working in these institution is helpful for serving the upper levels like provincial and

federal legislatures (Jabeen, 2019). LGs help in enunciation of community needs and manifestation of their microscopic interests, which ultimately leads to public welfare, fulfilling the demands of masses as they elect their representatives for running these bodies.

According to Lord Bryce, local institutions train residents to collaborate with other community members in addition to educating them about public affairs. Offering a shared and open platform, the institutions provide guidance for collective effort to solve local issues, fostering a sense of teamwork for the benefit of the community. Good government never merely meant providing services; it also ensures citizens' rights to life and liberty, providing them a forum for dialogue (Jabeen, 2021). Sustainable development is its mandatory task, enriching the quality of life for local people. The system's underlying philosophy posits public contribution in municipal affairs as an end and a mean for advancing democracy (Kejellberg, 1995:43).

The distance between the ruler and the ruled is reduced by LG. Due to small size and dense population, ancient Greek city states provided active public participation in politics. At present, direct public participation is difficult task because of growing population and vast geography of modern states, but LG has made it possible.

This study is an effort to look into the LGS in British India. The research problem posed in this study is to explore the purpose of LGs' formation, whether they were to cover the financial deficiency in the name of self-rule. The study is to test the hypothesis that the local government system was not introduced to facilitate the masses, but the concentration of power and amalgamation of fiscal resources remained the regime's priority. In this regard, the study has dealt with the following questions:

- Whether the local government institution played a role in service delivery at grass root level apart from collection of revenue and taxes;
- Whether the different Acts of British government strengthened the LG and gradually transferred authority to the masses, empowering them at grass root level.

#### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY & LITERATURE REVIEW**

The current study is based on historical research and qualitative methods, which are more appropriate such as content analysis,

discourse analysis and narrative analysis. These methods help in examining the data to derive conclusion. For primary sources, the study has relied on official documents like Indian Council Acts, diaries, letters, newspapers, and other artifacts from the period being studied. These sources provide firsthand accounts of events and assist the researchers to get a more accurate picture of the past. For secondary data, books, dissertations, journals, research reports, policy reports, magazines have been consulted. To explain the phenomenon of LG during British rule, all these sources have helped a lot in terms of explaining the system in colonial perspective as well as local perception.

There is abundant of literature on this topic, however, relevant work has been reviewed to examine the decentralization and local government in British India. LG is an old-age institution with a new concept (Tinker, 1967). The system has been working in India since ancient times, stimulating the uniqueness of human groups and promoting their activities. It reflects the spirit of a created or recognized society with laws for management of local affairs (Sharma, 1965). LGS was established in the subcontinent for local administration (Agarwal, 1991). In British India, self-rule was introduced for local communities. This system was established in pursuance of English tradition under Victorian Liberalism. Lord Ripon recommended drastic changes in Indian LGS and his views were even more 'advanced' than those of the stunt liberals. He himself admitted that his tenure strengthened his liberal convictions. He called the institutions of local government as 'engines for the training of the people (Weinstein, 2017). Malik & Rana (2019) opined that decentralization was a strategy for provision of service delivery to consumers, making the governments more responsive to public demands, improving the quality of public service with participation and empowerment of local units. The Local Government (LG) is always seen as a representative organization for implementing the crucial policies and regulations for the management of local affairs; but political history indicates that it has to face issues like poverty, economic decline, uneven and unjustifiable development (Quddus, 1981). According to Oates (1972:55) "each public service should be provided by the jurisdiction having control over the minimum geographic area that would internalize benefits and cost of such

provision". Bheenaveni (2011) argued that LG was created with a commercial purpose by a trading company to impose British rule and control of the revenue. But, with the passing time, the system authorized the people and raised awareness. In 1919, the local self-government was referred as a 'transferred subject' by Montague-Chelmsford reforms. This Act changed the status of LG by giving control to popular ministers and further strengthened the system by electing chairmen of municipalities. For local institutions, a schedule of taxes was laid down by the Act. Under the Act, control of LG was given to the provincial government, which made it more responsible (Sekar, 2008). Simultaneously, the workload of central and provincial governments was reduced by sharing the local duties with local bodies, while upper tiers were to spend time on national and provincial affairs (Agarwal, 1991). In this way, the system shares the authority in hierarchical order (NRB, 2000). Khushik, Ali Gul, et.al, (2015) evaluates the role, capacity, and performance of the local governance in disaster risk reduction (hereafter DRR) in Sindh. The study used qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and data analysis. Empirical evidence shows poor performance of the government authorities in all phases of DRR. The local governments or DDMA's miserably failed in performing the role. The findings further show that in all three districts, the government that could have responded to the floods, recovery and rehabilitation of flood affected people, reconstruction of infrastructure and people's lives and their prosperities did not exist (Khushik, Ali Gul, et.al, 2015).

#### **ORIGIN OF MODERN LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

In the first half of 19th century, the emerging liberal trends in Europe introduced the modern LGS. The motivated concept was to give chance to local communities for living their lives in accordance with their requirements and preferences. Its expression was freedom of action within society (Kejellberg, 1995). In Europe, this system reduced higher level institutional interference in local affairs. It was interpreted as an instrument of social freedom. Among the Western versions of LGS, the English pattern was the best one, which was followed by former colonies or English-speaking nations in African continent and South Asian region. In response to the problems created by industrialization and urbanization, modern system of LG evolved

(Wilson & Game, 2011). Applying this system, an effort was made to lessen the center's meddling in local matters. Urbanization was the consequence of Industrial Revolution, which eventually paved the way for the expansion of municipal functions. Cities were equipped with services like road construction, street cleaning, sanitation and drainage as the growing population was challenging the existing system of amenities, which were insufficient in these sectors. Additionally, other services like public health initiatives, educational institutions, and leisure activities were being demanded. Local authorities were also responsible to address the issues of law and order (Stoker, 1988:3). Decentralization developed and became a global trend, which was followed by Europe, Latin America, South Asia and South East Asia (Paracha, 2003).

#### **ROOTS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS IN SUBCONTINENT**

This system has passed through various stages and phases in Indian history with varying patterns in various times. The system was working in the form of Panchayat (council of five) for managing the local affairs. The village Panchayat was designed to perform administrative, legal and sometimes developmental functions, but was dominated by landowners or upper classes of society, whereas the poor and lower sections had no share or representation in these institutions. About Panchayats' geographical existence, history reveals that these were not working in all over the country and not in all periods of human civilization. Different writings of Manu, Kautilya and other philosophers have discussed about working of local system and linked its origin to the Buddhist period (Mukerjee, 2012:12). The religious books of Hinduism, Ramayana and Mahabharata have mentioned multiple types of local bodies, which used to perform administrative and legislative duties, apart from revenue and tax collection.

In pre-British times, the village Panchayat had no advance tradition of self-rule like the modern system or municipalities in urban areas. It was active in administrating the local affairs. The roots of system can be traced even in Vedic period (Sharma, 1997:13).It continued working in the Mauryan and Gupta dynasties as well, and even in medieval ages. In ancient Hindu rule, LG continued its working through town committees, known as 'Goshthis' and 'Mahajan Samitees'. The members of these bodies were esteemed by the

authority as they were assigned the task of revenue collection (Sharma, 1997). However, the changes occurred during the Mughal rule as new cities were developed and several buildings were constructed. The newly-built cities became trading centers and hub of business. The administration of these cities was responsible for roads' maintenance, collection of local taxes, construction of houses, etc. (Singh, 1997:13).

#### **FUNCTIONS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN SUBCONTINENT**

Since agriculture had been the primary source of income, the village served as the basic unit of governance and the hub of social life. The significance of local self-rule in towns or Panchayati Raj (the rule of the village community) remained active during the reigning period of Sultanate, Mughal, or even the British and the system occupied a considerable place in local affairs. The empires or outside invaders never dared to overthrow this system (Majumdar et al., 1970: 556). The aristocratic class and landowners, who used to run local affairs, typically controlled local bodies. The absence of higher intervention allowed the village or town to act as a self-governing unit, which was a positive aspect of system. The Gramani or headman was chosen by the community, along with other employees, and they were answerable to masses (Majumdar and Singh, 1997:30). Each one of them exercised individual authority to look after the local affairs, performing the administrative task with legal responsibilities, while tax collection was mandatory assignment. Additionally, these persons acted as a political link between the local writ and the federal authority. About this system, Sir Charles Metcalf, who served in India as an interim governor general (1835-1836) observed, "Panchayat Raj seems to last where nothing else lasts. Dynasties tumble down, revolution succeeds resolution. Hindu, Pathan, Mughal, Maratha, Sikh and English, all are masters in turn, but the village community remains the same" (Misra, 1960). Despite the autonomous status of Panchayats, they never served for the interests of the whole community and thus were not representatives of all groups. Apart from poor and lower social classes, women and minorities had no voice in these institutions. This feature shows the undemocratic nature of these bodies. Anyhow, they generated civic sense, provided share in local affairs and feelings of citizenship. In true sense, no visible change was made in local self-rule, however, reforms were periodically implemented, which caused

the continuation of the local bodies, allowing village Panchayats to conduct business as usual.

#### **LG UNDER BRITISH EAST INDIA COMPANY**

The British founded East India Company around 1600 AD for trading purposes. Later, it embroiled in Indian domestic politics and forcibly conquered several territories. It gave little thought to regional growth. In contrast, it damaged the foundations of the Indian economy and society. Its land and taxation policies were completely different from those of the Mughals, whom they succeeded in India. The new system almost destroyed the Indian economy. To fulfill the municipal needs, the Mughals instituted indirect charges like chungli in the towns. The company was not in favour of such levies since it would damage its business and commercial interests (Agarwal, 1991). Concurrently, the company had concerns about its employees' access to adequate health and sanitation services, as these were not properly available in India. Municipal institutions were mainly developed in those locations, where a large number of British employees and other Europeans were residing. The new system replaced the older one.

In December 1687, the company granted the charter for establishing the first Municipal Corporation in Madras (now Chennai) and Madras became the first Indian district, having the local self-government on the pattern of British Town Council (Ghosh & Pramanik, 1999). The company stopped charging fees like chungli, which was utilized for municipal services by the Mughals. It levied taxes for its own necessities, allocating the small portion for building the guild halls and schools (Venkataranagaiya & Pattabhiram, 1969). Municipal Corporation were established with an English man as Mayor and 12 Aldermen from the heads and chiefs of various castes. It was to convey the message that Company equally considered the members of all castes without any racial discrimination. Additionally, 60 to 120 Burgesses (both European and Indian) were also selected for each Corporation, while positions of town clerk and recorder were generated, but only Englishmen were appointed on these positions. The Mayor Courts were established, consisting of three Aldermen, who were known as Justices of Peace. Municipal Corporation was designed at the pattern of the City Corporation of London. It frequently exercised its judicial powers (Bheenaveni, 2011).

Simultaneously, the police was empowered by the company, removing the Kotwal. Since the Mughal days, local administration had been controlled by Kotwal, who was the pivotal of system, performing various tasks like managing the law and order situation and guaranteeing the provision of justice. Apart from it, this office was used to provide municipal facilities like roads' construction, collection of taxes and tolls, etc. Furthermore, the monitoring of markets was also included in his duties, along with checking weight scales, measuring and price control (Ghosh & Pramanik, 1999). The financial decentralization enabled the local bodies to construct the new roads and repair the old ones and public works. The British rule snatched the ancient local autonomy, which had so far been the base of Indian economy and this change proved the final nail in the coffin.

The old system broke down, losing financial control and administrative authority. Above it, the domestic industry was destroyed, causing a significant loss to the local communities. The accountant and the headman were hired as paid official employees. In districts, collectors, deputy commissioners, and district magistrates were generally appointed from the British, Therefore, the local authorities received no portion of the land earnings. The role of Panchayat was no more required for settlement of village disputes as this responsibility was taken by the city courts (Historical Background, n.d.:99). This practice curtailed the effectiveness of Panchayat's role in the indigenous judicial system, which was already perished with formation of regular courts. These courts implemented the state laws instead of the old traditions and even the distant villages were under this system's domain.

The main focus of the British was construction and development of trading centers and markets instead of improving the domestic affairs for public welfare. The local bodies were established on European model, nominating the members in the big towns. Anyhow, features of old and new systems were alike less or more. But, Panchayat lost its central role and status to a more formal, legal and impersonal system (Ghosh & Pramanik, 1999). Without a doubt, it is historical truth that the British kept the village as the fundamental administrative unit, while transforming the local bodies into representative institutions that were answerable to the people. These bodies were described by Dr. Mookerji as "the shell of the tortoise"

that had endured hardships, but lived. Numerous observers of Indian culture and social structure were surprised by the fact that the village system had persisted in India since times immemorial without undergoing any significant alteration (Majumdar and Singh, 1997).

The task of local welfare was the least concern of the British. They perceived the Indians as ignorant, backward, and incapable of handling the responsibilities of self-rule. The public's demand led to a few reforms or amendment in system. Besides, the focus was on a more centralized system. In British view, the system was unfit for India as the people were not familiar of democratic and representative bodies. Moreover, they were taken incompetent and incapable to run them (Misra, 1960).

#### **LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN BRITISH RULE AFTER WAR OF 1857**

After the war of independence in 1857, the greatest constitutional changes occurred and India went under the direct rule of the British Crown through the Government of India Act 1858. Realizing the need of public participation in governing matters, the British introduced the LGS in 1860s. Another reason was financial crisis and they tried to overcome it through this institutions. In the next half of the century, the Indian debt rose to 98 million pounds. In 1870, municipalities were founded in a few locations. Viceroy of India Lord Mayo submitted a resolution calling for financial assistance and Indian participation in LG. Practically, the nominating process continued in place of elections (Awan & Uzma, 2014). The general populace was not empowered by the system, and Lord Hobart, the governor of Madras, himself admitted in 1882 that the Indians were not given representation in Local Self-Government of Madras (Tinker, 1967:38). Realistically, the municipality was an oligarchy under joint control of the British and local influential persons and the former used it as a tool to enforce the new laws, levying new taxes, and securing British interests. This situation changed with appointment of Lord Ripon as viceroy of India after Lord Mayo. He introduced the Indian Councils Act of 1892, which allowed the British to enhance the representation of the Indians in legislative councils. He provided the fundamental guidelines for the growth of local entities through his resolution of Local Self Government. This resolution was regarded as the Magna Carta of local self-rule (Venkataranagaiya & Pattabhiram, 1969:109-

110; Tinker, 1967:44). It served as a basic reference in many legal and constitutional documents in the future. The resolution served the two-fold goals; the first was to give local bodies' access to "adequate resources, which were local in nature and local custody was required for them through local bodies. The second was to focus on the self-government in true spirit. Additionally, he was looking for recommendations to improve this system with imperative steps. He called it "an instrument of political and popular education" (Mahaeshwari, 1971:17). Ripon Resolution was based on five related reforms:

1. Proposed the formation of municipal councils in every Indian city, having population above 5,000. Local boards were suggested for all rural districts where 'intelligent local agency could be found'.
2. Suggested the composition of local boards in both rural and urban areas. Resolution insisted the provincial administrations to ensure a 'large preponderance' of non-official members, limiting the official members to one-third of the total strength. His proposal was to empower the non-official members with absolute authority, making them responsible for public services.
3. For boards and municipal councils, the Resolution recommended to elect the local members of the areas through elections. It also suggested to introduce the practice of election gradually even in backward rural areas. About electoral method, the local notabilities must be consulted by provincial governments.
4. One 'controversial' suggestion was the appointment of a non-official member as chairman of the Board, wherever it was practicable. Ripon strictly prevented appointment of any official chairmen, whereas non-official members must be "led to feel that real power is placed in their hands and that they have real responsibilities to discharge".
5. Finally, he stressed the need for financial decentralization as the Resolution insisted to authorize the municipal councils and rural local boards to manage all local responsibilities and levy taxes. It was also argued to empower these bodies for the construction of all public works (Weinstein, 2017).

Ripon's goal was to empower the people by transferring true authority to their representatives and making them accountable to

masses for service delivery. In this way, Lord Ripon altogether altered the system to support the elected premise. The resolution's first outcome was the enactment of those laws that allowed LGs to implement the general scheme for welfare of local community. The official committees were formed in many districts to improve the working, embracing Ripon's recommendations, particularly the elections of third-fourth-members by ratepayers. Bengal Act No.III of 1884 mandated the elections of two-third of municipal commissioners by the ratepayers in response to the Ripon resolution. Additionally, it declared that official members could not exceed the one-fourth threshold (Malik, 1929). Act XIII of 1884 authorized the municipal committees in Punjab to elect their presidents and vice-presidents, but conditioned it with official permission. With the provincial government's approval, elective elements could be implemented in a municipality, but there was no assurance that the decision could not be reversed in the future unless a majority of voters demanded it or it was deemed to be against the public interest. A law known as 1883 Act XV was passed in State of Oudh and the North-West Provinces, allowing one-fourth share for official members, whereas the other three-fourth were to be elected by ratepayers. The chairman and vice-chairman were to be chosen by the municipal committee. In practice, appointment of chairman of any municipality was the prerogative of provincial government as the authority laid with it (Beenaveni, 2011). The Ripon's resolution was approved by the crown, ushering in a new age of municipal government. The Ripon scheme, however, was not implemented by the local bodies, and the desired outcomes were not achieved. The center's overwhelming control over financial matters and resources was the main reason of low performance of these institutions (Sekar, 2008). The British agenda was not the provision of services through municipalities, but rather solving the financial issues. The British maintained their emphasis on administration, carrying out fundamental tasks with scant public utility service supply. They sought the assistance of notable locals in order to obtain public support and funding in lieu of these services. Adopting this practice, the system strengthened the landlords and tribal chiefs in politics, while offering limited voting rights to eligible persons and benefited a small section of population. However, the participation of their leaders in administration satisfied the people. The lower strata of population had

no share in these institutions, which turned into ‘a club of feudal lords, who administered and controlled the local officials’ (Muhammad, 2004). All these practices, ultimately led to federalism.

#### **CHANGES IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY**

In 1899, Lord Curzon succeeded Lord Elgin and abolished the local bodies and municipalities in 1904. His main concern was institutional centralization and uniformity of policy. He was ardent supporter of the authority of ‘Technocrats,’ and claimed that the local populace lacked the capacity for self-governance. During his rule, centralization was at peak. This policy was in violation of the Ripon's Resolution, thus its implementation became difficult and other reason was insufficient regulations (Beenaveni, 2011). In 1906, All India Congress Party raised the demand for self-rule, making it a political slogan. The British established a Royal Commission on Decentralization in 1907 in response to public demand, and two years later, in 1909, its report was submitted. The report provided details of the laws and regulations instructed by the Ripon Resolution. The importance of the Panchayati Raj was also acknowledged by the report (Boggs, 1911). About the local government, the report recommended that it was appropriate in terms of decentralization of authority as it shared power with local persons, appointing them masters of their own administration. Additionally, it noted that LG had not made any development since Ripon's resolution. The commission suggested elections, along with other proposals, which were to be conducted for choosing the headship of rural and urban entities, creating tehsil boards, and designating district officers as constitutionally-appointed heads of district boards with authority over finances (Tinker, 1967). The commission also suggested for non-official employees to appoint as municipal chairmen. At that time, roughly one-third of India's municipal chairmen were nominated from officials, one-third were elected officials, and one-third were elected non-officials. Local organizations served as an electoral college for election of a number of positions in provincial legislatures. The political parties also became active at local level to take part in local elections. However, LGs had poor resources as financial matters and taxes were in center's custody, while provinces were at its mercy (Beenaveni, 2011).

Another resolution from May 1918 was repeated verbatim from Ripon's resolution and contained no fresh ideas. The rural bodies, however, were in a position to collect special taxes and getting a portion of land income. In this duration, the British introduced Montague-Chelmsford Reforms 1919, which treated local self-government as a "transferred subject". The statute suggested to hand over the LGs to popular ministers under the 'diarchy scheme<sup>1</sup> and inter alia' provided for elected municipal chairmen. The ministers and legislative councils demonstrated considerable enthusiasm to have the power in local bodies as they wanted to liberate the system from official control and making it accountable to a much larger electorate.

Under the diarchy scheme, the provincial governments were empowered and LG was brought under their control. They assisted in improving the performance of local institutions, encouraging the populace to contest the municipal elections. A schedule of taxes was also laid down by the Act for local bodies (Sekar, 2008). Local governments' limited powers were further restricted by district officers as a result of this move, which rendered those rivals to district administration. Three presidencies, including Madras, passed new legislation to enforce the 1919 reforms, making them as guiding principles. For empowerment of the councils, the Municipal Act of 1919 and District Municipalities Act of 1920 were put into effect. Both laws empowered councils, providing liberty to choose their chairmen and authorized them to make their budgets.

In local administration, involvement of any external authority was very limited. The number of voters increased as all the rate-payers were given vote-right including women, who also got the right to become candidates in councils' elections after passing some times. The Act of 1922 granted vote-right to Bombay City, eliminating gender

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<sup>1</sup> Dyarchy was a system of dual government in provinces, introduced in British India under the Government of India Act (1919). The system divided the executive branch of each provincial government into official and popularly elected sections. Under the act, the executive authority was exercised by the governor-general on behalf of the crown along with three councils of ministers. Dyarchy was further divided into Reserved and the Transferred subjects. The concept of Dyarchy was introduced for better administration, giving more authority to British India for good governance with provincial autonomy. There was a division of the federal subjects between the center and the provinces, and the governor-general was to take care and coordinate with two parts of the government.

discrimination in the election of councilors. It gave the Municipal Corporation enormous authority. Another Act, adopted in 1925, required city municipalities to conduct elections covering one lakh voters. In municipalities, the proportion of elected members was increased up to eighty percent of the overall membership. A particular provision was created to provide representation to the minorities. The elective strength was raised to three-fourths in 1929 (Beenaveni, 2011).

The Government of India Act 1935 brought new set of reforms and enhanced provincial autonomy and provided guarantee through constitutional provisions, however it was restricted. The line separating the reserved subjects from the transferred subjects was removed. Under this Act, the subject of local government was transferred from British bureaucracy to Indian political leadership, and local administration became more powerful. Following the 1936-1937 elections, popular governments were put in place in several provinces. The provincial autonomy strengthened the LGS in India, giving it a chance to grow. Realizing their obligations towards the local bodies, the popular provincial administrations passed new laws for further decentralization, giving more authority to lower levels and bolstering local level of administration. The government rarely meddled in the local bodies' affairs.

Despite all this, the local populace expressed their reservations and demanded reorganization of local self-rule. For incorporating the public demands, different provincial governments established committees to reorganize the LG. These committees looked into the local self-government's structure, legislation, functioning and apparatus and made recommendations for improvement in institutional framework by granting more authority and resources. It was also proposed that the state government would define the limits of privileges and powers. By handing over the finances to popular ministers, the issues of economic concerns were resolved. However, the World War II (1939-1945) changed the situation and the popular ministries signed in protest to British policy of pushing India forcefully into war. They hardly served for two years from 1937 to 1939. Consequently, the recommendations made by these committees were not implemented and remained on paper. In 1947, India became independent and divided into two countries; India and Pakistan.

In coming years, every aspect of public life passed through new experience as different types of policies and laws were introduced. It opened a new era with changed brand of LGS in Pakistan. President Ayub was the pioneer to establish the system with name of Basic Democracies in 1959. Its explained goal was to decentralize the authority, implementing a system of shared responsibility from upper level to downwards. Decentralization unquestionably promotes economic growth with equal distribution of resources, ensuring social and economic development for all strata of society. In Pakistan, democratic administrations disregarded this arrangement and never made any practical effort to enforce it. The military regimes in Pakistan used LG as a tool for certain interests, including legitimacy. After Basic Democracies, two distinct local government systems were installed by military dictators, who in one way or other transferred authority at grass-root levels. No doubt, their agenda was to strengthen their position, but masses were beneficiary under decentralization of authority, either to a small extent.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Decentralization or devolution of power has been recognized as an effective instrument for empowering the people at grass-root level since ancient times. Its significance is equally recognized by earlier societies as well as exiting democracies. However, this institution did not deliver ideally in the past, despite having similar features of recent bodies. In subcontinent, local government not only worked for services delivery, but also fulfilled official financial agenda. Under this system, specific designs were gained. The Panchayat's aim was to provide services at local level, but its control in the hands of feudal and upper strata of society, never permitted it to act as a full-fledged public institution. The British replaced it with modern institutions and hired regular employees, removing the Gramani, Kotwal, etc. They claimed to follow the English tradition, but weak economy or colonial agenda of grasping the resources forced them to pursue this practice. The British-introduced system in India was different from original version as its focus was on revenues' collection from upper to lower level in India and other was to strengthen their rule, particularly the center. Despite claiming of decentralization, provinces were not autonomous in financial terms, having dependency on center. Local government

system could be revolutionized with true implementation of Ripon's resolution, but different practice was followed. Nevertheless, a few positive changes were viewed in consequence of this system and it worked as a political link between the local writ and federal authority. These institutions brought awareness among the masses, realizing the significance of their role and rights in administering their matters. The system also played a vital role for local economic development. The gradual transfer of power from upper to local community strengthened the populace to express their grievances overtly, which were incorporated less or more in decision-making process. All this contribution for improving the quality of life. In post-independence period, military regimes of Pakistan misused this institution for their legitimacy and concentration of power without provincial autonomy. The military governments remained reluctant to deliver through the provinces and directly accessed the local bodies for their specific objective; concentration of power, and this feature requires further research. The study has recommended that decentralization must be for mass empowerment instead of any new experiment or specific agenda like British rule, which was to provide optimism to people. The system is a public necessity to provide an active participation to strategize the governance for their benefits. Democracy is not in itself powerful unless its goal of good governance is not encouraged.

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