Politicization of Bureaucracy or Bureaucratization of Politics – Discerning Myth from Reality

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Abstract:
Bureaucracy is one of the most important pillars of the state, therefore it is important to study the factors that affect its efficiency and efficacy. It is general perception that bureaucracy is excessively politicized in Pakistan. Politicization impacts right from induction of a civil servant to the decision making by mid, senior and high level officials. This political interference negatively impacts the performance of civil service and affects efficient service delivery. Civil service works in close contact with political leadership, therefore there is an inherent potential for political masters to influence the decision making by bureaucrats. The study explores the factors that adversely affect the efficient working of bureaucracy and results in poor service delivery. Both primary and secondary data was used in the study. Primary data was collected through survey. A survey was conducted from amongst the senior officers of the Government of AJK depicts that the politicization is an irrefutable reality in the civil service. The study concludes that lack of job security and politically motivated decisions of recruitment, transfers and promotions, adversely affect the efficient working of bureaucracy and results in poor service delivery. This study recommends that situation can be improved by improving pay package and other perks of the government servants, establishment of independent Public Service Commission and empowering the Services Tribunal to monitor postings and transfers, and review civil servants’ complaints about arbitrary transfers; and ensuring job security through constitutional measures.

Key words: Bureaucracy, Politicization, postings & Transfer, performance

Introduction

Bureaucracy is one of the most important pillars of the state, therefore it is important to study the factors that affect its efficiency and efficacy. Despite being a very important pillar of government, the term ‘bureaucracy’ has turned satirical over time due to the specific role of bureaucracy in a government particularly in third world governments.

Bureaucracy is defined as a group of specifically non-elected officials within a government or other institution that implements the rules, laws, ideas, and functions of their institution. In other words, a government administration should carry out the decisions of the legislature or democratically-elected representation of a state. Bureaucracy may also be defined as a form of government: "government by many bureaus, administrators, and petty officials.

There is widespread political interference in the working of civil service in Pakistan. Bureaucracy itself is using political influence for illicit gains. There was a dramatic rise in military encroachments in civil service in Musharraf regime as retired and serving generals were appointed to key civil posts, such as the chairmanship of the Federal Public Service Commission, the premier agency for recruitment and promotions (Reforming Pakistan’s Civil Service”, Asia Report No.185 – 16 February 2010). During this period, appointments on all key administrative positions were subject to evaluation and clearance by the military’s intelligence agencies. Therefore after end of military rule, the civil service suffers dependency syndrome and taking support of political leaders for even otherwise legitimate desires. Once obliged, the civil servants have no option but to consider the demands of political master even if they are against the prevailing law.

Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study are to;

1. To explore the extent of politicization of bureaucracy in Pakistan and
2. How it is affecting the performance of public service as well as service delivery.
**Literature review**

(Robert Cameron, 2010) notes that Studies of politicization of public services are important because political involvement in management has often led to negative effects on service delivery. He also notes growing politicization of public service in developing countries.

(Imran Ali et.al.2011) Contends that plenty of efforts have been made to improve governance but politicization is the main obstacle in implementing policies to establish culture of merit in Pakistan. The Transparency International Pakistan in its National Corruption Perception Survey (NCPS 2009) stated that corruption has increased in last three years by 400% in Pakistan. According to respondents the civilian governments are more corrupt than past military governments in Pakistan. The main reasons of corruption were lack of accountability, lack of transparency and discretionary powers.

Good governance has 8 major characteristics. It is participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive and follows the rule of law. It assures that corruption is minimized, the views of minorities are taken into account and that the voices of the most vulnerable in society are heard in decision-making. It is also responsive to the present and future needs of society (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific). Political interference deprives bureaucracy of all the attributes of good governance.

In early 1980s, World Bank studied ability of bureaucracy to Promote order and development in the Third World, the study portrayed Corruption, inefficiency, bloated size, absence of accountability, and resistance to change as features of the bureaucracy.

(Ishrat Hussain, 2012) observes that the civil service has become politicized and lost its competence owing to distortions in human resource policies. Reforms are needed to make the civil service efficient, competent and neutral once again.

**Methodology**

Both primary and secondary data was used to explore the factors that adversely affect the efficient working of bureaucracy and results in poor service delivery. The primary data was collected through questionnaire from senior/controlling officers. A semi structured questionnaire has been designed to gather first-hand information on impact of politics on bureaucracy in AJK.

While secondary source included a review of documents, reports and relevant websites.

**Analysis of Bureaucracy in Pakistan/AJK**

The civil service works in close contact with political leadership, therefore there is an inherent potential for political masters to influence the decision making by bureaucrats. Over the decades, the failure of political process due to successive martial laws led to weakening of socio-political fabric of the country. The linkage of promotion and posting/transfer of civil officers with reports of military led agencies shattered the commitment and integrity of the efficient officers. The ruthless induction of army officers in civil services also compromised the efficiency of public service.

**Recruitment**

The officers of grade B-16 and above are recruited in government departments in Federal and Provincial Governments including AJK through Public Service Commission (PSC). The PSC comprises one chairman and a variable number of members who are responsible to evaluate candidates for recommendation to government.
for their appointment. The federal government has a central superior service comprising of 12 service groups. The most dominating service group is ‘District Management Group’ (DMG), all the key positions in federal and provincial governments, including federal secretaries, provincial Chief Secretaries and heads of major organizations are held by this service group. The Police service of Pakistan is most important group in management of law & order at district level, whereas secretariat or office management service is important at secretariat level. The rest of the service groups have limited role in policy making and decision making at national level.

The candidates for Central Superior Service (CSS) are selected through a tough competitive examination and deviation from merit is rarely questioned. However, the credibility of provincial and AJK PSC has been questioned time and again.

The AJK PSC is a constitutional body created under article ‘48’ of the Interim Constitution Act 1974, with the provision that it shall consist such number of members, including chairman, and perform such functions as prescribed. Azad Jammu and Kashmir Public Service Commission Act, 1986 required chairman and members to have worked as Secretary to the Government or at an equivalent position. A recent amendment in the PSC Actii has changed the qualification of chairman and members, the amended provision reads as follows;

‘Seven Members of the Commission shall be appointed from amongst the retired Civil Servants or other outstanding persons having good reputation and educational background of not less than graduation from any recognized University.’

This amendment has paved the way and provided much greater room to government for appointing any person who is graduate by qualification to the position of member or chairman of Public Service Commission. Recent appointments in PSC have proved that government has succeeded in making political appointments of chairman and members that is likely to put the credibility of PSC under clouds.

The history of AJK witnessed a blatant show of political power tarnishing the service structure of AJK by an Act of the legislative assembly. The government of Muslim Conference (1991-96) appointed a number of officers (estimated to around 400) in different government departments on ad hoc basis without fulfilling the requirement of law. The bulk of appointments were made on or before 16 Aug 1992, the date when AJK legislative assembly passed an Act under title ‘AJK Civil Servants (Regularization of Ad hoc Appointment) Act, 1992. The Act was meant to regularize all the ad hoc appointments made on or before 16 Aug 1992, and to provide permanent employment to political appointees without going through any test or interview. The law was, however, subsequently challenged in court of law and was repealed by High Court and the decision of the High Court was sustained by the Supreme Court.

Promotion Policy

A number of promotion selection boards (PSB) have been constituted at federal and provincial level to consider the service antecedents of civil officer for making recommendations for their promotion. For long, there was no procedure or SOP’s be followed by the PSB. It is pertinent to mention that in federal and provincial governments including AJK, there are two types of positions, selection posts and non-selection postsiii. The promotion on non-selection posts is made on the basis of ‘seniority cum fitness’ basis, whereas promotion on selection posts is made on ‘selection on merit’ basis. The seniority cum fitness constitutes fulfillment of minimum requirement for promotion i.e., minimum length of service, minimum qualification under rules and at least ‘good’ grading in ACRs/PERs. On fulfillment of minimum requirement, the senior most officer gets promotion. On the contrary, the promotion on a selection post is made on the basis of merit. The merit was neither defined nor a procedure to consider a promotion case on merit was in place until promulgation of promotion policy by GoP in 2007.
Consequently, the promotion on selection posts was purely the discretion of the PSB, and most of the time the promotion was made on seniority or an officer was superseded on some pressure, to accommodate a junior, without assigning any plausible reasons. In AJK, the PSB No. 1 (for recommending promotions to B-19 and above) in its meeting held on 2010, recommended supersession of senior doctors for promotion to BPS-20 on some charges levied by the secretary Health. The charges were considered despite the PER grading of officers were ‘good’ and there were no adverse remarks against them. However, the decision of the PSB was declared void subsequently by government and courts as it was not based on service antecedents of the officers.

The Government of Pakistan has adopted a promotion policy since 2007, quantifying the PERs grading, qualification (assessment by institutes under NSPP) and evaluation by selection board. This policy has been amended from time to time on need basis\textsuperscript{v} and strictly follows the merit based on the score of officers in the panel. However, the policy of promoting highest level officers of civil service to grade B-22 by the Prime Minister has been done away with by the verdict of Supreme Court reproduced below (daily ‘The Nation’):

‘The Supreme Court on Wednesday cancelled the promotion notification of 54 bureaucrats terming it null and void. These 54 bureaucrats are federal secretaries and were promoted to grade 22 by Prime Minister Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani on September 4, 2009. The SC directed the PM to again make appointments on these posts on merit. It is relevant to mention here that the promotion of at least 173 bureaucrats was overlooked in making these 54 promotions. The PM made these promotions under his discretionary powers.’

Though merit has become part of the promotion policy but appointment and promotion at various ranks of the civil service still continues to contain some political pressure.

In AJK, the selection posts continues to be filled solely on seniority, the definition of merit is still at the discretion of the PSB. The High and Supreme Courts of AJK have defined merit in certain court decisions that it shall be based on seniority, qualification and service antecedents (ACR’s gradings) etc. In a recent development, a committee constituted by government has proposed a promotion policy incorporating quantification of service particulars of a public servant\textsuperscript{v}. The policy is yet to be approved by the government.

It can be hoped and expected that with the promulgation of Promotion Policy in AJK, the meritocracy will prevail.

Transfer/posting policy

Posting and transfer is the area that is most politicized in the Services of GoAJK. Posting of choice is not possible unless it is sponsored by an influential political figure. Impact of posting/transfer varies from department to department, e.g., the officers and official of Education Department, Colleges & Schools always seek posting at a major town or close to their home. The services of college and school teachers are hired centrally and as per service rules, they are liable to serve anywhere within the territory of Azad Kashmir. There is always a tug of war between teachers for getting posting of choice and this is possible only with the patronage of political masters.

The teachers, in turn help political leaders in getting more votes in their village or baradari. On the contrary, officers of the departments like Public Works Department (PWD) or Local Government & Rural Development (LG&RD) seek posting which are more lucrative as it involves handling of more funds and more influence on contractors or public. Since the posting/transfer up to grade B-18 is in the competence of the Minister Incharge of the department, the officers approach him, who posts an officer of his choice on terms and conditions conducive to him. There have been many attempts to prepare a comprehensive policy for postings and transfers and for determining tenure of a posting, but none worked as the political considerations always bulldozed any such policy decision. Contrary to other provinces of Pakistan, postings & transfers are purely at the discretion of Politicians in AJK. In provinces of Pakistan, Ministers are entrusted with the responsibility of making decisions
at policy level only, whereas in AJK, the ministers are authorized to transfer officers of B-16 to B-18, thus politicizing the posting of officers.

An attempt was made to amend the ‘Rules of Business, 1985’ in the government of Muslim Conference (2006-11) in 2011, to authorize secretaries to the government for making postings and transfers, but was averted by present government. The postings are made on personal likes and dislikes and to accommodate officers who have a political clout. Merit, experience or knowledge/professionalism is not a consideration. To give an illustration of the plight of governance, in an instant case Director Fisheries was transferred and posted as Director Mineral, who in turn was posted as Secretary Population Welfare, Director Sericulture is heading Printing Press (to promote his junior as Director Sericulture) and an experienced officer of the Social Welfare department has been replaced by an officer of Industries Department, with relevant experience and knowledge.

Similarly, postings of officers of management group and police are politically motivated disregarding the capacity and capability of an officer. Posting of generalist cadre officers in autonomous technical organizations like TEVTA, results in failure of organization to deliver. The posting of officers on purely political considerations is promoting corruption and is a major cause of poor performance of public sector organizations/government departments, besides discouraging competent and hardworking officers. This one area if given due consideration i.e; neutrality in postings/transfers on merit, can change the image of civil service and will considerably improve the delivery of service in public sector.

**Politicization perception**

**i. Politicization perception survey**

There is no established mechanism to gauge the politicization of civil service in any part of the world whereas bureaucracy is criticized a lot for its decisions that are either biased or taken under some political or other pressure. In AJK, despite being a very close society, people are divided on a number of accounts. The divisions are based on regions (Muzaffarabad, Poonch and Mirpur being three main regions), family (baradari) and political grounds. This socio-demographic complex makes the governance difficult and most untrustworthy for the common people. The baraderis exercise their will through political pressure and make it very difficult for civil service to take decisions on merit. This state of affairs creates an atmosphere of incredibility and insincerity on part of government functionaries.

Since there is no study on the performance, efficiency and efficacy of civil service in AJK available, a survey has been conducted to gauge the perception of politicization of bureaucracy in AJK and its impact on efficient service delivery. The survey was conducted from amongst the senior officers of the Government of AJK, including Secretaries to the Government and Heads of Attached Departments, as mostly the decision of these officers are affected by political pressures.

The survey depicts that the perception of politicization is prevalent in the civil service. Postings/ transfers are mostly made under political considerations without considering the golden principle of right man for the right job. Bureaucracy and politician are generally responsible for this state of affairs, it is also considered that there is an unholy nexus between both, that is badly affecting governance in the state. The working of the officers has been affected with this plight and the performance of the majority (58.5%) can only be rated as average. The situation becomes worse when the element of accountability is found to be non-existent. An inefficient officer is usually transferred to a less important assignment and his performance never affects his career and promotion. Such officers at times reach highest positions and become a liability as they are seldom found suitable for any assignment.

The survey also questioned that how the overall performance of public sector is affected by politicization of bureaucracy? The summary of responses is as below;
Since politicization encourages those who have political connections, the hardworking and competent officers are de-motivated when they are ignored in postings or promotion they otherwise deserve.

- The output of civil service declines and results in promotion of a culture of corruption.
- Politicization results in red tapism and mismanagement.
- When a civil servant is obliged by a politician, he tends to compromise merit and rule of law.
- When politician is Incharge and a civil servant is holding a lucrative posting, the threat of getting posted/ transferred compels him to take biased decisions.

The response of the group surveyed is summarized as below;

- Financial and job security can make an officer to resist the undue pressure.
- The Public Service Commission must be strengthened to check the politicization at the very onset by making appointment strictly on merit.
- Creation of awareness among public can help ensure the rule of law in the country.
- Safeguarding tenure of a posting can help a civil servant to withstand political pressures.
- Self-respect and dignity of the officers must be protected to make them work without any fear.
- Accountability is a prerequisite for optimum working of the civil service, a system of rewards and punishment can help promote the efficient service delivery.
- Political interference be brought to the notice of seniors for rectification.

The results of the above survey depict that members of bureaucracy, consider politicization a major problem and reason for poor performance and corruption in the public sector.

**ii) Public opinion**

Gathering of primary data on public opinion on the public sector performance and politicization of civil services is beyond the scope of this paper. The research has therefore been based on the opinion of writers expressed in various newspapers. A review of the newspaper articles is given below to elaborate the public perception of the issue.

(Shaukat Masood Zafar) writes;

‘Politics is the profession of service to the people. When politicians seek money to get rich the nation is bound to head for trouble. The civilian government’s inability to deliver basic services and good governance has in fact time and again provided military leadership the opportunity to intervene. The fact remains that Pakistan suffers from the most corrupt, nepotistic and money – hungry administration ever seen in its history. People who work on right principles are unrecognized and considered to be foolish in today’s Pakistan.’

The daily Dawn observes;

‘In a traditional sense, bureaucracy in most political systems has been expected to ensure continuity of policies, political order/stability, uphold the rule of law, promote economic development and cultural cohesion…………………. But it is Pakistan’s politician who, in fact, exploited the working of bureaucracy for their own interest which ultimately created individual interests for their own benefits among the bureaucracy paving the way for it to accumulate the fortunes but not without at the cost of good governance’.

(Pranab Kumar Panday) writes in *The Daily Star*;

“Politization of bureaucracy is not a new phenomenon in democracy. However, the intensity of application and reasons for politicization vary from country to country. There are some levels of political involvement in personnel matters in all countries. For instance, the United States has over 4,000 political appointments at
federal level. Even Britain, which was considered to have a strong tradition of neutral civil servants, has shown evidence of greater politicization”.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concluded that politicization of bureaucracy is one of the key causes of the decline in the performance of civil service. The lack of job security due to politically motivated decisions in recruitment, transfers and promotion affects the bureaucracy. The lack of career planning perspectives for the staff de-motivates the competent and hardworking civil servants. Political interference is a major contributor towards declining efficiency of the bureaucrats. The incentive to work hard, to be fair, to be efficient erodes in such contexts. There is disconnection between performance and reward and individual merit is relinquished by political interventions and the efficiency and productivity of the organization are compromised. It can also be concluded that there is an illicit nexus between corrupt bureaucracy and politicians that is preventing improvement in the system and affecting the effective service delivery. Moreover, military regimes have led down civil bureaucracy by inducting and posting army officers at all key civil positions. The situation is complex and any improvement requires drastic changes right from the top and any chance for change in near future is logically not visible. However, following are some of the recommendations, if implemented, can help in improving this appalling situation.

1. Enhancement of civil service performance by:
   a) Increasing salaries, pensions and other perks ensuring financial stability.
   b) Conducting regular trainings, including refresher courses, at all levels of the bureaucracy;
   c) Linking an officer’s performance during training programs with promotions,
   d) Modifying Annual Confidential Reports (ACRs) to include tangible, performance-oriented criteria instead of subjective evaluations of officers’ personality and integrity;
2. Establishment of impartial and independent Public Service Commission to ensure merit based selection of civil servants and also instituting a transparent and competitive selection procedure to induct best of best candidates, barring any political influence.
3. Reducing excessive centralization of functions and devolving administrative and financial authority to lower tiers, with effective oversight;
4. Institute effective accountability over the civil bureaucracy by setting up an independent accountability commission,
5. Promote fairness and eliminate opportunities for political manipulations at all levels of the civil administration by:
   a) Expanding the role of the Public Service Commission (PSC) from a recruiting agency to one that professionally oversees all aspects of the bureaucracy’s functioning;
   b) Mandating parliamentary committees to vet and approve senior civil service appointments, proposed by the PSC, to ensure that they are made on merit rather than personal or political affiliation, followed by a vote in parliament;
   c) Guaranteeing security of tenure and providing civil servants legal protection against postings, transfers and promotions if they are contrary to the due process of law;
   d) Empowering the Services Tribunal to monitor postings and transfers, and review civil servants’ complaints about arbitrary transfers; and lastly
   e) Performance of civil servants be taken into account for further promotion and postings/transfers.

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