

## **A Theoretical Framework of Local Government**

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### **Abstract**

*The local government institutions have allowed effective participation and involvement of local people in their affairs. There is greater chance of achieving economic growth if institutions provide for popular participation, local leadership and the decentralization of authority. Of all government services, those provided by local government most directly affect the day to day lives of individuals. Decentralizing governance enables people to participate more directly in governance process and can empower people previously excluded from decision making. Decentralized areas of administration pave way towards a better understanding between citizens and officials. Local government provides training and apprenticeship for a professional political career. It increases efficiency and responsiveness of government.*

**Keywords:** Decentralization, urbanization, industrialization, devolution, mass participation responsiveness, efficiency

### **Introduction**

The local government institutions have come to play an important role not only in promoting the democratic values but also in accelerating the pace of development. Being elective in nature, they have allowed effective participation and involvement of the local people in the development of the local areas. Development whether social, political or economic becomes meaningful and real only when it stems from the lowest societies level, the so-called grass-roots level.

Democracy can be established in the country if the local government institutions are strengthened. Local government provides a means whereby citizens can exercise some control over their local affairs and express their will especially when they are disaffected with the policies of the central government.<sup>1</sup>

Local government is an institution, which deals with matters concerning the people living in the particular locality. It represents the microscopic interests of the locality leading to the broader concept of welfare and happiness of its people. The higher tiers of government e.g. Parliament decides the matters to be of local importance, whereas implemented by provincial governments. However, local government should be administered by local bodies, which are controlled by the central government.<sup>2</sup>

Local government is not a sovereign government. It has nothing to do with security, defence, bank rates, taxation, international trade etc on a national level, rather it acts as the representative body which makes the surroundings fit to live in, keeps the streets clean, imparts education to children, build houses and paves the way to enable the inhabitants to lead a civilized life.<sup>3</sup> Thus local government is an agent of social change.

Most modern states cover a large area and the administration of law requires not only a staff of officials appointed and controlled by government but also numerous local administrative agencies with staffs of their own.<sup>4</sup> In every state the work of the government is concentrated in the center where the legislature meets and from where the heads of the executive, with the secretariats direct the administration.

Administration however requires decentralization. The secretariat staffs are concerned with general principles like the framing of rules and regulations under laws passed by the legislature. They formulate broad lines of policy. These policies are enforced and carried out by officials or agencies posted or grouped throughout the country.

Decentralization within the state involves a transfer of authority to perform some service to the public, from an individual or any agency in central government to some other individual or agency, which is closer to the public to be served. The basis for such transfers is most often territorial, that is grounded on the desire to place authority at a lower level in a territorial hierarchy and thus geographically closer to service providers and clients. However, transfers can also be made functionally, that is by transferring authority to an agency that is functionally specialized.<sup>5</sup>

Decentralization of administration may be of two kinds: direct and indirect. Under direct decentralization the laws are made in the center and the provincial capitals in each of which is a secretariat composed of officials who work directly under the executive heads of the government. The actual details of administration however are carried out by officials of the government posted throughout the country. These officials work under the direct control of the government departments. Local government does not apply to such officials. It involves indirect decentralization. According to Sidgwick “ the term local government in a unitary state means organs which, though completely subordinate to the central legislature, are independent of the central executive in appointment, and, to some extent, in their decisions and exercise a partially independent control over certain parts of public finance. The term local government is applied to those organs which exist at the will of the central government, and which, while they exist have certain definite powers of making regulation, of controlling certain parts of public finance, and of executing their own laws or the laws of the central legislature, over a given area. These organs are essentially subordinate bodies but they have independence of action within certain stated limits. They represent a sub-division of the functions of government for the purpose of efficient administration. Part of the administration, as it was is parceled out to bodies each of which has its own area of operation.”<sup>6</sup>

The government of the people and by the people as visualized by Lincoln is obviously not possible in the modern nation states. It existed in ancient Greek city-states where people used to govern themselves due to smallness of area and population. In modern states, it is not possible for entire population to have a direct share in the government as expected by Seeley. In such situation, the national or central governments have created small self-governing units at the local level where the representatives of the people can sit to settle their problems and suggest measures for the welfare and development of the local areas. These small self-governing units viewed together form the local government in the country. So the local government in modern times is a combination of small self-governing non-sovereign units with maximum authority devolved on them by the central government to manage the local affairs with local resources without any interference from the center.<sup>7</sup>

John Clarke in his book “Outlines of the Local Government” defined local government as that part of the government of a nation which deals mainly with such matters as concern the inhabitants of a particular district or place and which it is thought desirable should be administered by local authority subordinate to the central government.<sup>8</sup>

According to the Encyclopedia of Social Sciences, local government may be loosely defined as a public organization authorized to decide and administer a limited range of public policies within a relatively small territory which is a sub-division of a regional or national government. Local government is at the bottom of a pyramid of governmental institutions with the national government at the top and intermediate governments (states, regions, provinces) occupying the middle range. Normally, local government has general jurisdiction and is not confined to the performance of one specific function or service.<sup>9</sup>

The entire problem of local government is the problem of personal touch with the affairs concerning the locality and their solution. If the local people are denied association with local life, they would not only stultify their talent, energy, initiative and enterprise but they lose all sense of responsibility. Some 95% of democracies now have elected sub-national governments and countries every where large and small, rich and poor are devolving political, fiscal and administrative powers to sub-national tiers of government.<sup>10</sup>

Decentralization may be within an organization or between the levels of government. In both cases it is thought essential for economic growth and for the more equitable distribution of the benefits of economic and social development. Experiences show that there is a greater chance of achieving economic growth if institutions provide for popular participation, local leadership and the decentralization of authority.

## **2.1 Evolution of Local Government**

The modern local governments are the creation of western and traditional cultures. Among the western patterns, the English pattern has been a source of inspiration for most of the English speaking countries and others that have come under their influence like South Asia, Africa etc.

To understand contemporary local government, it is essential to grasp the basis of its historical development and evolution. Local government was not evolved to provide a coordinate system of administration for the logically defined range of services; it emerged, piecemeal in answer to a succession of separate needs and demands.<sup>11</sup>

The very origin of modern local government was part of the libertarian trends in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Liberty for the local communities to develop according to their own preferences was a powerful ideological element in the introduction of local government system in most European countries. Local self-government was perceived to be an expression of freedom of society.<sup>12</sup> The creation of local self-government in the first half of the last century in Scandinavian as well as other countries was a deliberate attempt to limit the intrusion of central government in the affairs of local communities.

The modern local government system evolved in response to the pressures produced by urbanization and industrialization.<sup>13</sup> Due to Industrial Revolution and the factory system, urbanization took place and the most obvious political consequence of urbanization has been expansion of municipal functions. The cities require services, which are not, needed in rural areas e.g. sewage disposal, street cleaning and traffic regulation. Higher standard of urban population created a demand for such services as public health measures and recreation activities, which the rural population is not so likely to demand from its local government.

The rise of local government is closely tied to the process of industrialization which gathered momentum in Britain from the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Until the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the system of local government by corporation in the boroughs and justices of the peace in the counties had worked reasonably satisfactorily because the needs of communities were deemed to be small, their tasks were primarily judicial and administrative. The mid 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the culmination of the first great phase of urbanization in English history caused by the development of machinery and the factory system of production and the comparative reduction of dependence on agriculture production.<sup>14</sup> The movement of population from rural to urban areas was accompanied by severe problems of overcrowding, law and order and ill-health.<sup>15</sup>

The existing system proved inadequate to meet the needs of the new urban areas. The immediate response to this was the creation of a series of adhoc, single purpose bodies which included poor law boards, turnpike trusts and boards of improvement commissioners.<sup>16</sup> The improvement commissioners were responsible for paving, cleaning, the lighting of streets and provision of watchmen. These adhoc bodies were effectively controlled by Tory Squires and traditional land-owning interests. The prosperous entrepreneur who dominated the expanding cities and towns resented their lack of control over the full range of civic affairs. Under these pressures the 1835 Act created elected municipal councils and gave to them a range of powers and property.

In USA, local government institutions grew in response to a combination of citizen demand, interest group pressure and state government acquiescence.<sup>17</sup> There were only half a dozen cities in 1790 and not until 1820 was there a single city of over a hundred thousand populations. By 1940, however, there were a total of 3,464 incorporated urban places in US, 2,042 of which had a population of over 5,000, whereas the urban population constituted 3% of total in 1790 and 26% in 1880, the figure had risen to over 56% by 1940.<sup>18</sup>

The reasons for the growth of urban areas had been various. The primary factor has been the Industrial Revolution and the factory system, necessitating the concentration of workers in close proximity to the factories and related economic enterprises.<sup>19</sup> Another reason for urban growth had been increased knowledge of medicine and public health, enabled many people to live in close quarters. Advancement in means of transportation has made it possible for dense populations to live together, too. Another significant reason has been the psychological lure of city life, the great potentialities for adventure, excitement, experimentation, education, economic advancement and cultural development to be found in the cities. Another reason was the extension of the franchise on a progressive basis led to the demand for participation and representation in local affairs, which had previously been denied to a large proportion of the newly enfranchised classes.

In the developing countries many of the policy makers are convinced now that to keep the policy decision making centralized at federal or provincial capital means dangerous concentration of powers at the national level far from those on whom these vital decisions have an impact.

## 2.2 Philosophy of Local Bodies

Local government occupies a position of importance in the lives of the citizens. Of all government services, those provided by local government most directly affect the day-to-day lives of individuals. It is a generally accepted notion that the local authority provides many services, which are necessary in civilized life. These services may be roughly classified as environmental and personal.<sup>20</sup> The environmental form of local government includes protecting of our lives and property by an efficient police, and the planning of streets and open spaces in the interest of safety, health and even beauty, whereas the personal services include the schooling of children, the specialized work of the hospitals for accidents and diseases, and in case of need, the help of the social welfare departments. Local government came into existence for the purpose of providing the amenity to the masses.

In addition to the actual services furnished for the citizen, local government serves less tangible but equally important purposes in a democratic society. For one thing, it provides a stage for civic action, a school of citizenship.<sup>22</sup> Many citizens experience a feeling of helplessness when they are confronted by national or international problems. National or international affairs seem too vast and remote to be influenced by the group of individuals living in the remote area. The result is that the citizen's sense of partnership is hampered in public affairs. But at the local level, citizens have an opportunity to participate as actors in the drama.

Local government in any country is needed, as it is impossible for a single authority directly to undertake the performance of all those duties adequately, effectively and efficiently. In fact, the central government has neither the time nor the requisite knowledge of all the diverse problems, which are peculiar to different areas.

According to Laski "We cannot realize the full benefit of democratic government, unless we begin by the admission that all problems are not central problems and that the result of problems in their incidence requires decision at the place, and by the persons, where and by whom the incidence is most deeply felt"<sup>23</sup> This constitutes the real problem of local government and from this emerges the need for decentralization.

Decentralizing governance enables people to participate more directly in governance processes and can empower people previously excluded from decision making. By allowing local communities and regional entities to manage their own affairs and through facilitating closer contacts between central and local authorities, decentralization enable more responses to people's needs and priorities and makes development more sustainable through genuine ownership.

Decentralization is a global trend and local governments have been empowered in many countries in Latin America, Asia, and the Middle East and Africa, Europe and North America. Kalin gives four reasons for strengthening local government. They are:

- a. A local body is more accessible and quicker in response. Local services and programs can be more easily adapted to a specific local need.
- b. The allocation of resources can be done most efficiently the responsibility for each outlay is given to the level of government, which is the most close to beneficiaries.
- c. Local development assists in reducing costs. If the locals feel that the money is theirs, then the local people are more likely to be watchful over expenditure and to utilize money more efficiently In addition, it provides more opportunity for public contributions to augment a local project.
- d. Development programs undertaken with public participation permits for adaptation to the specific needs of the locals. People are ready to give money if they are able to participate in the decision-making process and feel that the specific project benefits them directly. Improvement of locals increases sense of ownership and responsibility for the program. The public becomes stakeholders in the success of the program. Therefore, they are more likely to invest their resources and time into their resources and time into advancing the goals of the program. In turn, these assist in producing superior outcomes rather than if the development programs are decided from distant government agencies. Thus, beneficiaries who possess ownership of the program are also more likely to ensure sustainability. The fact that the locals are involved in the early planning encourages careful monitoring and protection of the results of the planning exercise. The federal government lacks knowledge about local problems and needs.

They do not understand differences in local needs and conditions because the knowledge happens to be thinly distributed across the entire community are not available to the central planning agency. Even the greatest central planning agency cannot decide whether, in a particular local village case, improving the irrigation system or expanding schooling is more significant at a specific time. Only the local government can decide these things.<sup>24</sup>

A primary source of support for decentralization comes from classical liberal democratic political theory such as the work of J.S Mill and sees both national and local level benefits arising from devolution and mass participation in formal political structures at a local level.

### **2.2.1 Source of Popular Participation**

Local government provides a platform for genuine participation of the people at the grass-roots level in the government affairs. People become active citizens through association with government and do not remain mere subjects of the government. Being closest to the people, local government is also most easily accessible to them and people can generally expect to exert influence to a greater degree on it than on the remote state or central government. Decentralized areas of administration pave way towards a better understanding between citizens and the officials. The importance of local government lies in the involvement in the local public affairs not only of those who are elected but also indirectly of the community at large who elect them and to whom they are ultimately accountable.

According to Francesco Kjellberg, "Districts and counties, or the equivalent local entities exist, because they are perceived to be major vehicles for the access and sustenance of citizen's participation in public affairs,"<sup>25</sup> It is an instrument for strengthening democracy in society at large, The democratic ideal in local government implies that active participation of the citizens in local affairs is both a goal in itself and an instrument for strengthening democracy in society at large.<sup>26</sup> First, participation represents a real occasion to influence the decisions about everyday life; it narrows the gap between the rulers and ruled. Second, it creates the possibility for political education. Active participation in local affairs has been perceived as most important training ground for democracy. Through participation citizens become familiar with public issues.

### **2.2.2 Political Education and Training**

Participation is itself a form of political education.<sup>27</sup> It teaches the mass of the population about the role of political debate, the selection of representatives and the nature of policies, plans and budgets in a democracy, Local elections are especially important. Even non-voters are likely to have their political awareness and governmental knowledge increased through the heightened media attention given to local issues and candidates during the campaign period, Councilors and candidates through their election addresses and manifestos, have to defend their actions or propose alternative policies.

For its most active and involved participants local government provides not just education, but a training and apprenticeship for a professional political career "local bodies provide an excellent school of training for the wider affairs of central government."<sup>28</sup> Laski says that the institution of local government is educative in perhaps a higher degree than any other part of government.<sup>29</sup>

It provides an outlet for competent and public spirited persons of the locality to render social service to the community. From these experienced persons emerge leaders who can take up responsibilities for state and national levels.

### **2.2.3 Dispersing Power**

When people participate in government affairs, government powers are obviously shared by the people at the local level. Powers do not remain concentrated at the center. Local government is the best solution of the maxim that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. A significant dispersal of power away from the center, by extending choice, encouraging initiative and innovation, and enhancing active participation, is likely to do more for the quality of government and the health of democracy than its centralization and concentration.<sup>30</sup> The problems associated with democratic decentralization are minimal compared with problems associated with the excessive centralization of power. Centralization of power means the presence and functioning of a strong bureaucracy. Bureaucracy may create and provide for conditions of an effective and efficient government, which is, no doubt the nature of a good government. But a good government is no substitute for self-government.

Unless local bodies are entrusted with active powers, the central authority will stifle all local initiative and interest. Local government, therefore, is necessary for efficiency and responsibility.

#### **2.2.4 Responsiveness and Efficiency**

Local government institutions increase efficiency and responsiveness of government<sup>31</sup> Elected local bodies offer the most efficient way of handling the discrepancy between needs and demands in the community as well as production of public benefits. Locally elected leaders know their constituents better than authorities at the national level and so should be well positioned to provide the public services local residents want and need physical proximity makes it easier for citizens to hold local officials accountable for their performance. Responsiveness of government is improved because local representatives are best placed to know the exact nature of local needs and how they can be met in a cost-effective way.<sup>32</sup>

#### **Conclusion**

Local councils have been called as little parliaments of the town, the city and the village and like the great parliaments of the nations, they manage their local areas more efficiently because they are more familiar with the people and the area they are administering. The whole system of democratic local self-government cannot help but bring the mass of citizens into intimate contact with the persons responsible for decisions.

The phenomenon has over the year evolved the position of a permanent system of democracy and good governance. This has been studied, observed and analyzed by various scholars.

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