

An Insight into Local Government in Bangladesh

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This is the review of the book titled ‘Local Government in Bangladesh: Some Contemporary Issues and Practices’, by Mohammad Mohabbat Khan, published by A H Development Publishing House, co-publisher Democracywatch, Dhaka, 2011 Pp.: 134, Price BDT 450.00, ISBN:978-984-8810-12-5

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The Constitution of Bangladesh cherishes bold promises for a democratic society with freedom and justice for all the people. Local Government is a government that has a specific area based on social structure and legal basis; it is a necessary organization to conduct its own affairs. The core of all such local task is that they are decently local in character and need local solutions in dissimilarity to the requisite of the people inhabiting that zone. Most of the nations of the developed as well as developing countries of the world asserted the administrative structure down to the smallest units of the government to meet the demand and interactions with its people. The countries which have involved the grass root

level for planning, they have been successful in obtaining higher economic growth and per capita income.

The history of local government is very long and shares its history with the undivided Indian subcontinent. Local government got a legal shape with a municipal administration system for the first time in 1793. But, Gram Panchayet (local government village tier), an identical system of local village society did exist in India, had a noteworthy role. The Bengal Act 1842 and Municipal Act, 1850 were presented in the continuing improvement of the system. In 1947, the local government system acquired a strong base by a formation of 118 Municipal Boards in Bengal after inclusion of provisions relating to a new system of conservancy activities, social arbitrations, and appointment of choukidars (guards) for conserving safekeeping in towns and villages. After the British regime, Bangladesh was a part of Pakistan for 24 years. Pakistan did not bring any substantial structural change in its local government until President Ayub Khan introduced the concept ‘Basic Democracy’. After that army rule the basic system was adversely affected.

After independence of Bangladesh in 1971, the Constitution of Bangladesh emphasizes the need for establishing local government with a representative character. The creation of elected local bodies at each administrative unit- District, Upazila (sub-district) and Union (current lowest tier of local government) are mandated by Article 59 of the Constitution of Bangladesh.

In Bangladesh, There are two types of local government settings one is rural and another is urban. There exist three-tier structure at the rural level, which is Zila (district) Parishad (office), Upazila Parishad, and Union Parishad (UP). The six largest cities have the City Corporation status, while the rest is known as Pourashavas or Municipalities at the urban level. A large number of functions and duties relating to community welfare as well as local development are delegated with these bodies.

The most important layer UP is responsible for executing 48 duties, among them 38 are optional and 10 mandatory. They are responsible to accomplish civic duties, tax collection, maintaining law and order, and development work. Despite the significance and potential of local government institutions, they remain fragile in Bangladesh.

The book under review written by Professor Mohammad Mohabbat Khan focuses on the lower tier of local government Union Parishad (UP) which is very much closer to the citizen. The book is based on field research undertaken by Democracywatch. One research is about the legal and practical

limitations preventing local government body's performance another is about the tax payment behavior of the citizens of UP. Different chapter of this book is well decorated to provide an insightful picture of the activities of UP.

Divided into six chapters, first three deals with one research and second one is another three. Chapter one of this book includes the assigned task on UP and practical constraints to the effective functioning of that. Regarding the research this chapter includes the objectives of the study, methodology to conduct the study, the study area, sample size, method of data collection and its way of analysis, population and unit of analysis, significance and limitations of the study and most important is defining the conceptual issues like union parishad, local government, local self-government, standing committee, annual development programme etc. Chapter two contains the evolution of the local government structure, related analysis of findings of the survey by ask questions to the concerned people, Focused Group Discussion (FGD) also conducted to find out proper results. Then the chapter focuses on Major legal and practical constraints on the functioning of UP like lack of public awareness, lack of coordination, too much political pressure, gender discrimination, etc. Chapter three contains analysis of the major study findings, recommendations and conclusion of the first research. Here author expresses the about the presence of political interference in the matters of UP and constitutional loopholes in local government management. Chapter four initiates the

second research about the tax payment behavior of UP citizens. Constitutional issues expressed here regarding the financial matters of local government and study objectives, methodology, significance, limitations and conceptual definition discussed in this chapter. Chapter five describes about the sources of income of UP's on the perspective of current and comparative analysis. It also presents the findings of the study. The last chapter analyses the findings of the study and emphasizes on the necessity of amending the rules and regulation to broaden the scope of local resource mobilization.

However, the recommendations given by the author in this book that specify ways towards the goal of consolidation of local government institutions at a grass-root level. The results of the two research, discovers the problems and prospects of UP. The author deserves compliments for his scrupulous exertions to collect and arrange all relevant data, analyze them meticulously and offer criticisms where required.

Overall, the book is thought provoking and informative as well. It makes a valuable insight into the functioning of local government basically UP, it's legal and practical impediments side by side the financial issues of UP. For the readers and researchers who want to increase their horizon of knowledge, this book provides strong ideas about the contemporary issues of local government. This book will also be useful for the leaders who want to make the local government as purely an autonomous body.