**Is power the essence of bureaucracy?**

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In Pakistan, the word “bureaucracy” is often associated with the term “power,” along with phrases like “where there is power, there is everything.” This mistaken association has created significant problems within our society. Imposed and solidified perceptions play a crucial role in shaping the views of those who are on the receiving end. The social stigma linking power to bureaucracy in our country has been consistently ignored. It’s evident that people tend to think in alignment with their upbringing. Consequently, children and young individuals in our nation are taught and conditioned to become seekers of power. This obsession with power, as history illustrates, has driven individuals to madness and the brink of destruction.
Civil servants serve as the backbone of any state. Consequently, one wonders if weakening this backbone, which bears the burden of the state amidst a consistently heated political environment, would yield any benefits. Bureaucracy is a fundamental institution that underpins a functional and stable nation. However, expecting significant change within a system based on outdated colonial laws is unrealistic. Undoubtedly, change is necessary, but it shouldn’t come at the expense of eroding civil servants’ confidence and self-esteem, which develop through a rigorous and merit-based process of evaluation.
Returning to the discussion of reforming bureaucracy, the first step should involve educating and enlightening aspiring individuals that bureaucracy is not solely about attaining power but also about enhancing the well-being of the state and its citizens. As long as the power stigma remains attached to bureaucracy, our nation will struggle to make meaningful progress. This leads us to the question that leaves many pondering: how much power is excessive, and should power be entirely eliminated? The answer to the latter part of the question is that removing power completely would hamper a civil servant’s ability to uphold the rule of law, for which the display of force—associated with power—is essential. As for the extent of power, reforms should focus on empowering civil servants rather than constraining their morality. In essence, civil servants’ authority should not be diminished to a level where they feel helpless, unworthy, and hesitant in carrying out their duties.
Critics who scrutinize the perks and privileges granted to bureaucracy should recognize that these rewards are not handed out indiscriminately. Rather, they are well-deserved acknowledgments earned through hours, days, weeks, months, and years of unwavering dedication and hard work. Individuals achieve these positions after succeeding in the country’s competitive examination (CSS). This brings us to another issue linked to the competitive examination: the “labour market matching problem,” which denotes a misalignment between candidates’ qualifications and the positions they ultimately assume. Practically, this might entail handpicking specialists from various fields to lead the country, but this approach is far from feasible. Our bureaucrats undergo comprehensive training programs that objectively guide their actions in alignment with their roles, all aimed at achieving a singular objective: the welfare of the people.
To achieve the goal of aiding the public and alleviating their hardships, it’s crucial that civil servants aren’t left feeling powerless. As mentioned earlier, power must not be diminished to a point where politicians hold the upper hand. Eliminating political influence is essential to liberate civil bureaucracy, enabling it to operate at its maximum potential and shielding civil servants from the anxiety of frequent transfers, particularly to remote areas.
In conclusion, reforming bureaucracy in Pakistan should center around empowering civil servants for the betterment of the nation and its citizens, while reducing the fixation on power and political influence. By doing so, the country can establish a robust and efficient bureaucracy that serves the people and upholds the principles of good governance.