

EVOLUTION OF THE PRESIDENT’S OFFICE IN PAKISTAN SINCE 1956

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**Abstract**

Pakistan adopted Government of India Act, 1935, as an interim constitution. This Act had rested some unprecedented powers in the Governor General. The framers of the first constitution rested similar powers in the office of the President. The constitution of 1962 adopted pure Presidential form of government. All the tectonic and executive powers were vested on the office of President under the constitution of 1962. This concentration of powers led to the disintegration of Pakistan in 1971. While keeping this historical incident in mind, the framers of 1973’s constitution declared President as a nominal head of the state and introduced parliamentary form of government. Nevertheless, in 1985, General Zia-ul-Haq introduced the Eighth Amendment which changed Pakistan’s system of government into a hybrid system where powers were shared by The President and Prime Minister. It changed the nature and shape of 1973’s constitution and enhanced the authority of the President. Furthermore, in 2010, the parliament introduced the Eighteenth Amendment and restored the constitution of 1973 to its original shape. All the executive powers were vested on the parliament and President was made a tutorial head of the state. This paper examines the evolution of the office of President under the three constitutions and the subsequent amendments made to the constitution of 1973.

**INTRODUCTION**

Throughout the history, the office of The President became the center stage of politics in Pakistan. The office of The President was first time introduced in the constitution of 1956. The constitution of 1956 introduced parliamentary form of government and executive authority was vested upon the office of President. However, this constitution could not be prevailed for long and was abrogated after two and half years. The second constitution was adopted on 1<sup>st</sup> March 1962. It introduced Presidential form of government. The significance of this constitution was that it vested enormous powers on The President and

there was no mechanism of check and balance upon his powers. This led to the disintegration of the Federation of Pakistan and played a significant role in the separation of East Pakistan.

The Constitution of 1973 introduced parliamentary form of government and executive authority was vested upon the Prime Minister and his cabinet. The President was made a ceremonial head of the state with no real powers. However, the Constitution of 1973 was amended several times in order to empower the office of the President. The major amendments in the constitution were made by General Zia ul Haq

under the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment and all the executive powers were given to the President. Political forces attempted to subdue the powers of President through 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment in 1997. In 2003, the then President of Pakistan General Pervez Musharraf introduced the 17<sup>th</sup> Amendment and once again distorted the constitution of 1973 in order to strengthen the office of President and particularly his rule.

After the revival of democracy in 2008, all the political forces agreed upon and made consensus to restore the constitution and parliamentary sovereignty. The 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment curtailed the powers of The President and once again made him a mere ceremonial head with no real powers. The executive authority was vested upon the Prime Minister and his cabinet, and The President has to act only on the advice of Prime Minister.

**Literature Review:**

G.W. Choudhary in his book "CONSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN PAKISTAN" says that the executive authority was vested upon the President under Article 39 of the constitution of 1956. The President was empowered to nominate a member of National Assembly as prime Minister as he thinks that member can secure the vote of confidence.

Syed Jabbar Ahmed in his book "FEDERALISM IN PAKISTAN: A Constitutional Study" argues that the constitution of 1962 vested unprecedented legislative powers on the office of President. Under Article 29, the President was empowered to promulgate ordinances which have the same weightage as that of an act of central legislature.

The constitution of 1962 provided enormous powers to the President. Hamid Khan in his book "Constitutional and Political History of Pakistan" says that in order to avoid any deadlock between the President and the legislature on financial matters, it was decided that any previous budget will not be changed by the legislature without the assent of President and in return the President will not impose any new tax or expenditure without the approval of legislature.

Shahid Hamid in the article "The 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment: Restructuring the Federation" says that The President was mere a ceremonial head under the constitution of 1973. He has to act only on the advice of the Prime Minister. However, he was given some discretionary

powers under this constitution like he was empowered to grant pardons or relieve punishments given by any court of law.

**Objectives:**

I.To explore and illustrate the executive role of President.

II.To find out the role of President in legislation.

III.To explore the judicial functions of President.

IV.To find out the role of President in financial matters.

**Hypothesis:**

In hypothesis, we usually try to find the relationship between and among different variables which the researcher selects in order to establish a credible argument at the end. So, for this study the researcher has selected multiple variables to make a comparative study of the office of the President using the three constitutions of Pakistan. The variables included: the executive powers of the President, the legislative powers of the President, Judicial powers of the President and the role of President in the distribution of financial resources in the country.

**Conceptual Framework:**

While studying the evolution of President's office in Pakistan, it is necessary to examine the role of President in executive, legislative and judicial matters. This study explores and illustrates the role of President in executive, legislative and judicial sphere through comparative study of the three constitutions of Pakistan and the subsequent amendments that have altered the functions of the office of President. Also, the role of President in distribution of financial resources is examined in this study.

**Research Methodology:**

This research is exploratory research based on qualitative analysis of data. Secondary source of data is used in this research and the data is collected from books, articles, journals, websites etc. The domain of this research is the office of the President under various constitutions.

**Significance of the Study:**

I.Office of the President should be Apolitical.

II. He should not have any inclination towards a specific federating unit.

III. He should ensure national integration and national harmony through his conduct.

IV. He should hold the office and abide by its rules in the true spirit of the constitution.

### Office of the President under The Constitution of 1956:

The first constitution of Pakistan was adopted on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1956. Under the constitution of 1956, Pakistan would be a federation with parliamentary form of government. There will be a unicameral legislature which means there will be only one house of the parliament. This constitution proclaimed Pakistan to be an Islamic Republic. "The constitution of 1956 was very lengthy composed of two hundred and thirty-four articles which were divided into thirteen parts and six schedules."<sup>1</sup>

Under 1956 constitution, the executive authority was vested upon the President. Article 39 of the constitution provides the procedure for exercising executive powers. Under Article 32, The President has to be a Muslim and minimum age required would be forty years. It also implies the condition that he should be eligible to contest for election as a member of the National Assembly. The electoral college for President's election would be National Assembly and Provincial Assemblies. The term of office was five years and one can hold the office for not more than two terms. These provisions were laid down in Article 33.

"The process of impeachment was mentioned in Article 25 which states that on violating the constitution or any gross misconduct, The President would be impeached with absolute majority by the National Assembly."<sup>2</sup> According to Article 34, he would not hold any public office but was allowed to hold public property. Article 36 provides that in the absence of The President, the Speaker of National Assembly would act as The President until he returns.

### Functions and Powers of The President:

<sup>1</sup> G.W. Choudhury, CONSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN PAKISTAN (London: Lowe & Brydone Ltd, 1959), 102.

The functions of President were divided into four categories depending upon their nature and are as under:

- I. Executive Powers
- II. Legislative Powers
- III. Judicial Powers
- IV. Financial Powers

### Executive Powers:

As the executive head of state, The President was empowered to appoint the Governors of provinces, principal military officers, Inter-Provincial Council and Council of Islamic Ideology on the advice of cabinet. He was also entitled to proclaim emergency and suspend provincial governments. President was supreme commander of armed forces, and the administration of federal capital was also vested on The President.

### Legislative Powers:

On the advice of cabinet, The President can summon, prorogue or dissolve the National Assembly. He could also address the national Assembly. Taxation and expenditure bills required the President's approval. He has the veto power over provincial laws. All the bills required the assent of President. If a bill fails to acquire assent, then two third majority of the National Assembly was required to pass the bill. "The President was also empowered to make laws through ordinances if the assembly was not in session. If the assembly validates the ordinance with an act of parliament, then it becomes law otherwise it would expire after a time period of six weeks."<sup>3</sup>

### Judicial Power:

Under the constitution of 1956, The President was given the powers to appoint Chief Justice of Supreme Court and judges of supreme court and high courts. He could also appoint the Advocate General of Pakistan. Furthermore, he was given the powers to pardon. He could remit, suspend or commute the punishment sentences.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 123.

**Financial Powers:**

President has a role in financial resources distribution through the appointment of National Economic Council and National Finance Commission. "In case when the National Assembly is not in session or stand dissolved, the President could authorize expenditure from Federal Consolidated Fund through an ordinance."<sup>4</sup> However, such ordinances had to be laid before the National Assembly after its reconstitution or its new session.

**Office of The President of Pakistan under The Constitution of 1962:**

"The constitution of 1962 was adopted on 1<sup>st</sup> March 1962."<sup>5</sup> This constitution provided federal structure with presidential form of government. The parliament has a unicameral legislature giving equal representation to both East and West Wings of Pakistan. It contained two hundred and fifty articles divided into twelve parts and three schedules. According to Article 9 of the constitution, there shall be a President of Pakistan. The President of Pakistan has to be a Muslim and minimum age required to be a President was fixed at thirty-five years against forty in the previous constitution.

There would be indirect elections for President through the electoral college of Basic Democrats. This electoral college was composed of eighty thousand members, forty thousand from each province. "Article 155 deals with the electoral college and election procedure for The President. There would be not more than three candidates for the office of President. If there were more than three candidates, then the Speaker of National Assembly in a joint session of national and provincial assemblies select three candidates. If the sitting President also contests, then the number of candidates will be four."<sup>6</sup> A person cannot hold the office of President for more than two successive terms unless approved by a joint session of national and provincial assemblies. Furthermore, there was no limit on the number of terms with the

approval of legislature as provided by the Article 166. The term of office was fixed for four years.

The process of impeachment was laid down in Article 13 of the constitution. The President can be impeached on charge of violating the constitution or gross misconduct. One third of the national assembly members have to write to the speaker for the removal of President. To pass the impeachment resolution, three-fourth of the total members vote was required. "If the resolution fails to secure half of the total number of members votes then the membership of national assembly of those who moved the resolution will be ceased."<sup>7</sup> The removal of President on the grounds of mental illness also requires the similar process laid down in Article 14. Article 116 provides that President is exempted from legal proceedings as long as he holds the office.

**Powers and Functions of The President:****Executive Powers:**

Article 31 of the Constitution of 1962 provides that executive authority lies with The President. He is responsible for effectively carrying out the functions of central government. He is responsible for implementing laws, manage foreign affairs and conduct war. He appoints central ministers, governors of provinces, principal military officers, council of Islamic Ideology, election commissioner and Federal Public Service Commission.

The President was supreme commander of armed forces and was responsible for the appointments of the chiefs of armed forces. The President was also given the powers to determine the salaries and allowances of the forces. Under this constitution, The President acts independently and did not require the advice of cabinet. Perhaps, he appoints the council of ministers, and their term of office depends upon the pleasure of President. "He has the power to remove any minister at any time without any explanation."<sup>8</sup> Not only this, but The President can also disqualify a minister for five years. However, the ministers have

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Wheeler, "Pakistan: New Constitution, Old Issues." *Asian Survey* 3, no. 2 (1963): 107-15. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3023682> Accessed on: 02-28-2022.

<sup>6</sup> G.W. Choudhury, *CONSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN PAKISTAN* (London: Lowe & Brydone Ltd, 1959), 194.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 195.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 197.

been given the option to appeal against their disqualification.

### **Legislative Powers/Functions:**

In presidential form of government President is not an integral part of the legislature and this system is based on the theory of separation of power. In contrast to this, the presidential system introduced in the constitution of 1962 has made President and integral part of the legislature. "According to Article 19, the central legislature shall consist of President and National Assembly."<sup>9</sup> The President was empowered to summon and prorogue the assembly under Article 22. If the assembly was summoned by the Speaker, then the President cannot exercise this power. The President is empowered to dissolve the National Assembly, but he will also lose the presidency by doing so and new elections will be held for both the President and National Assembly. During the process of impeachment, he cannot dissolve the assembly.

Under Article 24, "The President can call for referendum if there is a difference of opinion between him and the legislature."<sup>10</sup> The referendum will be carried out by the electoral college. The President was also empowered to veto bills. If a bill is passed by the national Assembly, it will be sent to the President for his assent. The President can give assent to the bill, withhold assent from the bill or return the bill with some recommendations. If the National Assembly passes the bill with two-third majority, it resends the bill to President. Now the President can either give assent to the bill or refer it to referendum. If the electoral college passes the bill with a majority, then it will be deemed as assented. Article 29 gives the power to promulgate ordinances if the assembly is not in session or stand dissolved. However, these ordinances need to be tabled before the National Assembly as soon as the assembly is in session.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 200.

<sup>10</sup> Syed Jaffar Ahmed, *FEDERALISM IN PAKISTAN: A Constitutional Study* (Karachi: Pakistan Study Centre University of Karachi, 1990), 59.

### **Judicial Powers:**

The President was empowered to grant pardons. He could reprieve the punishments given by any court of law. He was also given the powers to appoint the judges of Supreme Court and high courts. In addition, he could also appoint the Advocate General of Pakistan.

### **Financial Powers:**

In terms of financial powers or functions, The President was entitled to appoint the National Finance Commission and National Economic Council. Previously passed budgets cannot be changed by the National Assembly without the approval of President. The President cannot levee a new tax without the consent of legislature. The Federal Consolidated Fund was managed by the President through an act of ordinance. However, such ordinances required to be laid down before National Assembly for approval.

### **Office of The President and The Constitution of 1973:**

The constitution of 1973 was promulgated on 14<sup>th</sup> August 1973. This constitution provided federal structure with parliamentary form of government. It introduced for the first-time bicameral legislature, the Upper House is called 'Senate' and the Lower House 'National Assembly'. This constitution made the Prime Minister (PM) chief executive of the Federation. All the powers rests with the cabinet headed by the PM. President was made a ceremonial head of the state. All the powers were exercised in the name of President by the PM and his cabinet.

"The constitution of 1973 contained 280 Articles divided into twelve parts and six schedules. The second schedule deals with the process of election for the President."<sup>11</sup> Qualification for being elected as a President were that he must be a Muslim and qualified to be a member of National Assembly. The age limit was forty-five years (minimum). The electoral college for President's election was the parliament.

<sup>11</sup> HAMID KHAN, *CONSTITUTIONAL AND POLITICAL HISTORY OF PAKISTAN* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2017), 271.

Members of the parliament in a joint sitting can vote for the President. The term of office was for five years, and one cannot hold the office for more than two successive terms.

“The President can be removed on the grounds of violating constitution or gross misconduct, physical or mental illness by the parliament with two-third majority in a joint sitting.”<sup>12</sup> The advice of PM was binding on him, and he cannot act independently. The President was to be informed by the PM on foreign and internal policy matters. He should also be informed of all legislative proposals before tabling them in parliament.

### Functions and Powers of The President:

#### Executive Functions:

The President was empowered to appoint the Governors of provinces, chiefs of the armed forces, council of Islamic ideology, Chief Election Commissioner and Auditor-General. The armed forces navy, military and air force were maintained and raised by The President. He was also given the powers to proclaim emergency whether political or financial. All these powers were subjected to the advice of Prime Minister. The President, on the advice of P.M can dissolve provincial assemblies.

#### Legislative Functions:

The legislative functions of The President were also executable on the advice of P.M. The President can dissolve the National Assembly on the advice of P.M. If he fails to do so, then the assembly will be automatically dissolved after forty-eight hours. He can also summon and prorogue the National Assembly and can address and send messages to it.

“He cannot withhold the assent to a bill for more than seven days. The bill will automatically become an act of parliament after seven days if The President withholds it.”<sup>13</sup> He was also empowered to promulgate ordinances when the assembly is not in session. However, they need to be laid down before the assembly after the session is resumed. Such ordinances were deemed to be expired after four

months or any resolution is put forward against it at any time by either house of the parliament.

#### Judicial Functions:

The President, on the advice of Prime Minister can appoint the Chief Justice and other judges of the Supreme Court and high court judges. He also appoints the Attorney General of Pakistan on the advice of P.M. he was also empowered to grant pardons and reprieve punishments given by any court of law.

#### Financial Powers:

Under the Constitution of 1973, The President was made only a tutorial head of the state, and no real powers were vested upon him. However, he was given some powers which he could exercise on the advice of P.M. He can constitute the National Finance Commission and National Economic Council that deal with the financial matters of the state. He could also establish the Council of Common Interest which deals with matters that were the subject of both federal and provincial governments.

#### Office of The President and The Eighth Amendment:

The eighth amendment changed Pakistan’s system of government into a hybrid system where powers were shared by The President and Prime Minister. It changed the nature and shape of 1973’s constitution. It enhanced the authority of the President. “The 8<sup>th</sup> amendment was adopted by the parliament in September 1985”<sup>14</sup> in the form of an indemnity bill. The Main provisions of 8<sup>th</sup> amendment that directly affected the office of The President were as under:

I. Through 8<sup>th</sup> amendment, The President was made the chief executive of the federation under Article 90.

II. Electoral college of the President was extended to provincial assemblies through Article 41. It also validated the referendum through which Zia ul Haq became President.

III. Article 46 changed the nature of relationship between President and P.M. It included that it is the

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 275.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 276.

<sup>14</sup> AQIL AHMAD, THE EIGHTH AMENDMENT: A COMMENTARY (Karachi: Current Books, 1989), 5.

duty of P.M to inform the President about all decisions of cabinet.

IV. The word 'impeachment' was added to the process of removal of President.

V. President was also made an integral part of legislature through article 50.

VI. Article 58(2)(b) empowered the President to dissolve the National Assembly on condition that if the government is not carried out in accordance with the constitution.

VII. The time to give assent to bills was extended from seven to thirty days.

VIII. Article 94 empowers the President to ask the P.M to continue to hold his office even when the assembly is dissolved.

IX. The President was also given powers under Article 203C to establish federal Shariat Court and appoint its judges.

X. All the appointments were made under his discretionary powers which were previously done on the advice of P.M.

XI. The President's actions cannot be challenged in any court of law.

XII. He will be the supreme commander of armed forces.

XIII. Article 270A was added to the constitution to validate all the actions of President Zia ul Haq and his government from 1977 to 1987. This also gave legal cover to the Martial Law imposed by Zia ul Haq.

#### **Thirteenth Amendment and its implications on the office of the President:**

"The 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment was adopted on 4 April 1997. It ended the discretionary powers of the President vested upon him through the 8<sup>th</sup> amendment."<sup>15</sup> The main features of this amendment relevant to the office of presidency were as under:

I. It omitted the Article 58(2)(b) which empowered the President to dissolve the National Assembly on his discretion.

II. The discretionary powers of Governors under Article 112(2)(b) to dissolve the provincial assemblies were also omitted.

III. The advice of P.M was binding on The President.

<sup>15</sup> HAMID KHAN, CONSTITUTIONAL AND POLITICAL HISTORY OF PAKISTAN (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2017), 451.

IV. He can appoint the governors of provinces and chiefs of armed forces on the advice of P.M.

The 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment practically ended the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment and once again made the President a ceremonial head of the state. It reinstated the constitution of 1973 to its original form in context to the powers of The President.

#### **Seventeenth Amendment and the office of The President:**

"17<sup>th</sup> Amendment bill was passed by the National Assembly on 29 December 2003 and was passed by the Senate on 30 December 2003."<sup>16</sup> This amendment distorted the original constitution of 1973 just like the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment and transferred the powers from P.M and parliament to the President. It incorporated its provisions from the Legal Framework Order (LFO) 2002. LFO amended 29 articles of the constitution out of which only nine articles were amended by the 17<sup>th</sup> Amendment. Important provisions of this amendment relevant to the office of President were as under:

I. The 17th Amendment affirmed all the amendments made under LFO and all other laws made after October 1999.

II. Article 270AA provided legal cover for all the acts of President Pervaiz Musharraf.

III. Article 58(2)(b) was readopted with a new clause which states that the dissolution will be referred to the Supreme Court within fifteen days of the dissolution.

IV. Governors will be appointed by the president after consultation with the P.M.

V. Article 112(2)(b) was also revived which empowers the Governors to dissolve the provincial assemblies with the approval of President.

VI. The President was empowered to appoint the caretaker government when the National Assembly is dissolved.

VII. Under Article 268, eleven more subjects were added to the list of subjects which cannot be changed or amended by the National or Provincial Assemblies without the approval of The President.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 492.

## Office of The President and the Eighteenth Amendment:

The constitution of 1973 was disfigured by the 8<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Amendment. “The 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment restored the constitution to its original shape and vested the executive authority in Prime Minister and his cabinet.”<sup>17</sup> The President was mere a ceremonial head without many powers under the 18<sup>th</sup> amendment. It ended the hybrid system of Presidential and Parliamentary form of government and made Parliament sovereign over all other institutions. “The 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment was promulgated on 19 April 2010 with the assent of President Asif Ali Zardari. 97 Articles were amended, modified, substituted, added or omitted under 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment.”<sup>18</sup> Main features of this amendment that affected the office of The President are as under:

- I.LFO 2002 was declared unlawful and repealed.
- II.The 17<sup>th</sup> Amendment was also repealed which curbed the extensive powers given to the President.
- III.Article 58(2)(b) was omitted which empowered the President to dissolve the National Assembly on his discretion.
- IV.Under Article 72, The President can withhold his assent to a bill for ten days and can send back the bill to parliament for reconsideration within this time frame.
- V.Under Article 89, the power of promulgating an ordinance by the President can only be extended to a time period of one hundred and twenty days by a resolution of parliament. If it is not approved as an act of parliament then it will cease to exist.
- VI.The power of governors to dissolve provincial assemblies with the approval of President was omitted.
- VII.The President can appoint the most senior judge of Supreme Court as Chief Justice of Pakistan under Article 175A.
- VIII.The President can appoint the caretaker P.M and his cabinet with the consultation of leaving P.M and Opposition Leader.
- IX.Under Article 243, President will be the Supreme Commander of armed forces and the appointments of chiefs of armed forces will be made on the advice of P.M.

<sup>17</sup> Shahid Hamid, MAKING FEDERATION WORK (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2015), 77.

## Conclusion:

The evolution of the office of The President was dependent upon the regime type throughout the history. The democratic governments focused on strengthening the parliament and made Prime Minister and his cabinet more powerful. They vested the executive authority on the Prime Minister and made The President a ceremonial head of state with limited powers. The President was not empowered to act independently and was bound to act on the advice of Prime Minister. On the other hand, the dictators during their regimes, made the office of The President more powerful and strong. A strong Presidential office suits the dictators as they hold the office through unconstitutional means.

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<sup>18</sup> HAMID KHAN, CONSTITUTIONAL AND POLITICAL HISTORY OF PAKISTAN (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2017), 566,567.