

Bureaucracy and Power Politics in Pakistan: A Study of Roedad Khan

By

Aqsa Basheer
BS History, Department of History and Pakistan Studies,
University of the Punjab, Lahore

Prof. Dr. Naumana Kiran
Department of History and Pakistan Studies,
University of the Punjab, Lahore.

Abstract

This study examines the role of Roedad Khan, one of Pakistan's seniors and influential civil servant, in Pakistan's power politics from 1965 to 1993. It investigates how did the higher bureaucracy serve as a tool for political power in Pakistan's praetorian state? The study traces Roedad Khan's career through his role in five critical episodes of Pakistan's history i.e. presidential elections 1965, East Pakistan crisis 1971, his service as Federal Secretary Interior during General Zia ul-Haq's Martial Law, and political engineering during late 1980 and early 1990s. This study explores that Khan was not a neutral administrator but was an active player in the politics of authoritarianism in Pakistan, such as electoral rigging, press censorship, intelligence coordination, and political repression. The article then studies the paradox of Khan's public appeals for democracy and constitutionalism after his retirement and his institutional record for the past decades. The study has been produced while applying qualitative historical case-study approach based on memoirs, contemporary accounts, newspaper sources, and scholarly literature. The results enrich the scholarly discussion on the role of the bureaucracy in authoritarian systems, the civil-military relationship in Pakistan, and accountability in praetorian political systems.

Key Words: Bureaucracy; Power Politics; Pakistan; Roedad Khan; Praetorian state; Civil-Military relations; Interior Ministry; political repression; authoritarian governance

Introduction

The higher civil bureaucracy of Pakistan has always been an active player in the country's power dynamics, providing service to successive military governments, manipulating the constitution and playing a role in the administration and functioning of the system through networks of power which often skirted the democratic structures. Existing literature has focused on these dynamics at the

institutional level, but this study focuses on the career of Roedad Khan as one of the institutional characters, who spent four decades in the civil service, amidst some of the most important political crises during Pakistan's history. This study aims to explore how Roedad Khan used his bureaucratic roles for political purposes rather than administrative ones under different regimes? How had he supported the authoritarian regimes? The study finds that he supported the authoritarian regimes of Ayub Khan, Yahya Khan and Zia ul Haq through information control, coercive administration and politically motivated accountability proceedings. It also explores contradiction between Khan's documented role in supporting authoritarian rule while in power and his public persona as an opponent of military intervention and undemocratic politics following his retirement from office. The study demonstrates that Roedad Khan was not only a bureaucrat who executed the government orders, but also actively participated in decision making of the government and reinforced the authoritarianism in the country, especially during the Zia ul-Haq regime. His career reflects the ability of individual bureaucrats to shape the power dynamics without being directly involved in politics. In this study the qualitative, analytical and descriptive case study method is used based on both primary and secondary sources to assess the role of Roedad Khan in the Pakistan's Power Politics.

Theoretical Framework and Institutional Background

Max Weber, a German sociologist, is considered as the starting point of any serious study of bureaucracy. In his writings at the start of twentieth century, he attempted to explain that modern states and large organizations work through bureaucracy. To him, bureaucracies are the most effective mode of human organization, and the defining characteristic of modernity.¹ It is a system of rational-legal authority. He identified some characteristics that are the main attributes of the best bureaucratic organization. First, it has a definite rank, and everyone knows who is above and who is below. Secondly, the officials have specific and written responsibilities that do not allow them to be doing whatever they please. Thirdly, appointments are based on tests and technical capacity, not on personal relationships or birth. Fourth, officials are paid regular salaries and serve full-time; it is their job.

¹Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, ed and Translated Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 956-58.

Fifth, the official decisions are made in written form, following formal procedure and making a permanent record. Sixth and most importantly, the personal life of the official is entirely distinct from his official duties; he cannot use public resources for personal gain.²

It is an ideal type that was defined by the Weberian school of thought and sets the benchmark for the assessment of civil service development in Pakistan. This study emphasizes that though the formal structure of hierarchy, written procedure and centralization is still present in the bureaucracy as it was inherited at independence, its functioning is far from Weber's ideal of a rational-legal bureaucracy and is firmly embedded in the power dynamics of the country. The engaging narrative of Pakistan's administrative history is not what the civil service did in the administration and governance of the country but how it played its part in becoming a political actor. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, senior officials were not only implementing policy, but they were also formulating policy, as well as managing it and even sabotaging it against the government they were supposed to represent.

Non-elected institutions have been a recurring feature in Pakistan's political history since 1947, shaping the country's political landscape. Political institutions included military coups, constitutional ousting of elected governments and the ongoing hegemony of the civil military establishment, frequently functioning outside of their administrative functions. In this praetorian system, the role of the senior civil servants was crucial as they were instrumental in the exercise of power, opposition control, and the preservation of state power. Of all the bureaucrats who played a key role in this edifice, Roedad Khan is one of the most important and controversial in the political history of Pakistan.

The pattern started with Governor General Ghulam Mohammad, former Civil Servant who dissolved the Constituent Assembly in 1954, and the court's decision on the basis of doctrine of necessity legitimized the action.³ His successor, Iskander Mirza was also a former bureaucrat, who dismissed elected governments

²Ibid., 956-60 and Irfan Ahmed Shaikh, *Bureaucracy: Max Weber's Concept and Its Application to Pakistan* (Lahore: Progressive Publishers, 2014), 45-48.

³Hamid Khan, *Constitutional and Political History of Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 82.

repeatedly, suspended the 1956 Constitution and invited military rule.⁴ During Ayub Khan's tenure, the bureaucracy gained unprecedented institutional power as civil technocrats, senior administrators and individuals like Altaf Gauhar played a major role in policy formulation, information control and implementation of the Basic Democracies system, while the Planning Commission largely took the place of political participation in development planning.⁵ The administrative reforms of 1973 by Bhutto eliminated the CSP and reorganized the civil service. The new reforms also introduced a degree of politicization of the civil service, however, by arbitrary dismissals, lateral political appointments and the employment of the Federal Security Force, which reduced the neutrality of the bureaucracy.⁶

During Zia-ul-Haq's regime, the bureaucracy reasserted its administrative power and was increasingly patronized by the military. The senior bureaucrats were placed at executive and advisory posts instead of representative institutions.⁷ In the democratic systems of the 1990s, the autonomy of the bureaucracy was not fully expanded due to the continued manipulation of transfers, postings and promotions for political ends. As a result, over the years, no matter what reforms were introduced in the institution and what changes in the regime took place, the bureaucracy was always a tool of state power, exercising influence through changing alliances without being held to account by the constitution.

From 1947 to 2000, Pakistan has had four military takeovers, and four dismissals of elected governments from 1988 to 1999. This is a praetorian state,⁸ a concept which political scientists describe as a state where military repeatedly encroaches into civilian political life, as in this case, using force, or the threat of force, to win political victories regardless of constitutional form. Under those circumstances, the senior civil bureaucracy is not made redundant but rather is turned into a tool. It ensures continuity in administration in the face of regime

⁴Sarfaraz Hussain Ansari and Fatima Bajwa, "Higher Bureaucracy in Pakistan: An Historical Analysis of Praise and Blame," *ISSRA Papers 11, no. 1* (2019): 81.

⁵*Ibid.*, 85.

⁶Hassan Askari Rizvi, *Military, State and Society in Pakistan* (Lahore: Progressive Publishers, 2000), 152-153.

⁷Ansari and Bajwa, "Higher Bureaucracy in Pakistan," 87.

⁸Ian Talbot, *Pakistan: A Modern History* (London: Hurst & Company, 2005), 334.

changes, translating political decisions of the coercive center into institutional action and coordinates between military power and civil rule.

In this system, there was a clear and distinct place for the Interior Ministry; it was the primary instrument of political control exercised by the successive military regimes. It was the responsibility of the Federal Secretary Interior to coordinate law and order, civil intelligence, FIA, all paramilitary forces, administrative management of political surveillance and suppression, and provincial law and order coordination.⁹

Roedad Khan served in this capacity for a decade straight during Zia ul-Haq's tenure. He is the best-documented case of a Pakistani subject in whom the bureaucracy played a role in the country's power politics throughout this period.

The career of Roedad Khan needs to be understood in this larger context of politicization of bureaucracy. His career of 40 years in several governments is a condensed example of how an individual bureaucrat ascended through and contributed to the institutional power. He served under the five Presidents i.e. Ayub Khan, Yahya Khan, Fazal Ilahi Chaudhry, Zia-ul-Haq and Ghulam Ishaq Khan and was a part of the administration of three Prime Ministers; Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Muhammad Khan Junejo and Nawaz Sharif. His other postings included Chief Secretary Sindh, Chief Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Managing Director Pakistan Television Corporation, Information Secretary of Pakistan, Secretary of Labour, Secretary of Tourism, Interior Secretary of Pakistan, Federal Minister of Accountability, and Advisor to the Prime Minister and President of Pakistan.

Khan's career is particularly notable for its length, variety and political entanglements. He witnessed the entire political development of Pakistan from its inception till the establishment of martial law and later a democratic dispensation of the late 1980s and 1990s. Perhaps most importantly, during Zia ul-Haq's decade in office, he held the high office of Secretary of the Interior Ministry, where he was in the center of the regime's apparatus of political control. Roedad Khan, just like the

⁹Parvez Mahmood, "Roedad Khan – A Man For All Seasons," *The Friday Times*, April 2024.

rest of the bureaucrats who helped shape this structure, is one of the most important and controversial figures in the history of Pakistan's political affairs.

Early Political Conduct: The 1965 Election and Karachi Violence

In 1965 presidential elections, the President of Pakistan Ayub Khan was defeated by Fatima Jinnah, sister of the founder of Pakistan, in few of the Urban constituencies including Karachi and Dhaka. She was leading the Combined Opposition Parties.¹⁰ Ayub Khan, however, won elections with 61% votes. The victory in Karachi was a rejection of administrative and political machinery which were used to get results for the government and to affect the electoral college consisting of 80,000 basic democrats. The regime felt the need to punish the city. The next day, on the day after results, an armed mob comprised of armed supporters of the Pathan community attacked the Urdu-speaking Mohajir community of Karachi as a victory procession. More than two dozen people were killed.¹¹ In Roedad Khan's career it was the first organized ethnic riot in the post-Partition history of Karachi. At the time, Roedad Khan was the Commissioner Karachi, the highest civil official in the city.¹²

Khan admits in his memoir that he was "not aware" of the planned procession or of the impending attack until he got a phone call from a private citizen just after 10:30 a.m. the next day.¹³ He was the top-ranking government official in a city where the day after a government-busting election, a political mob attacked and killed dozens. These were the institutional tasks he was responsible for, concerning political gatherings, deployment of police, the coordination of intelligence and the approval process for political processions. It would be either that he was not intelligent enough to understand, or that his subordinates did not want to report to him. No explanation has been given for either of these. This episode

¹⁰ Altaf Gauhar, *Ayub Khan: Pakistan's First Military Ruler* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1993), 106.

¹¹ Ibid., 174–177.

¹² Mahmood, "Roedad Khan – A Man For All Seasons."

¹³ Roedad Khan, *Pakistan: A Dream Gone Sour* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 20.

was the first time in his career that he maintained a pattern of the denial of institutional knowledge that would appear in the next decades.¹⁴

Information Control and Political Complicity; East Pakistan Crisis

During the crisis of 1971, Roedad Khan was secretary to the Ministry of Information. The period observed the deadlock after the first general election in Pakistan, the suppression of East Pakistan by the Pakistani army and finally, the establishment of the country of Bangladesh. Being top civil official in charge of the state's communications system, he had great impact. The main duties of his ministry were vital for the martial law, including handling of press relations for the government and supervision of strict access barriers for domestic and foreign reporters.¹⁵

Expulsion of foreign journalists from East Pakistan before Operation Searchlight on March 25–26, 1971, was a well-coordinated administrative move to avoid international record of the military attack.¹⁶ This wasn't a field decision that was made on the spot. The filtering of foreign media access was a part of the operational planning of the crackdown; the Ministry of Information was the administrative organ responsible for the implementation of the crackdown.¹⁷ In the academic analysis of Sisson and Rose of the 1971 war, which relied on interviews with the key decision makers, including Yahya Khan himself and documents they had access to through the US Freedom of Information Act, established that the media ban was neither an accident nor a later addition to the military campaign, but was part of the planning from the start.¹⁸ G.W. Choudhury, an insider cabinet minister who was present in Dhaka during the talks, says that the higher civilian officials of the Yahya government were aware of the military's plans in time.¹⁹

¹⁴Mahmood, "Roedad Khan – A Man For All Seasons."

¹⁵Abdul-Rahman Siddiqi, *East Pakistan: The Endgame-An Onlooker's Journal, 1969–197* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2017), 17.

¹⁶Mahmood, "Roedad Khan – A Man For All Seasons."

¹⁷Siddiqi, *East Pakistan*, 100.

¹⁸Talbot, *Pakistan: A Modern History*, 201–202. Talbot draws on Richard Sisson and Leo E. Rose, *War and Secession: Pakistan, India, and the Creation of Bangladesh* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

¹⁹G.W. Choudhury, *The Last Days of United Pakistan* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1974), chap. 8.

The clearest indication of Roedad Khan's own point of view in 1971 comes from Brigadier A.R. Siddiqi, head of the Inter-Services Public Relations directorate of Pakistan's army and the country's chief press officer. Siddiqi wrote in his book that on the morning of 26 March 1971, hours after the army had started killing Bengali civilians and Operation Searchlight had been launched, Roedad Khan went to the Dhaka cantonment where senior military officers including Tikka Khan were taking breakfast.²⁰ He said, '*Yaar, imaan taaza ho gya*' (Friends, faith has been revived).²¹ It wasn't the response of a man who was unaware of the military's plans, nor the response of a man who had advised against it. It was the reaction of someone who knew what had happened and welcomed it.

Later, on Geo TV, Roedad Khan claimed that he had suggested to Yahya Khan to move towards a political solution and he rejected it.²² This is the opposite of the eyewitness record of Siddiqi, as well as the pattern throughout his career of presenting himself as helpless and morally opposed that is not substantiated by the contemporary records.²³ In the Financial Express Bangladesh his role is criticized as "No one has ever questioned him about his state of joy on 26 March 1971. As with many others Bhutto, Yahya Khan, Rao Farman Ali he has always thrown the blame at others."²⁴

Another incident of information management occurred during the last days of the Yahya regime, as separately recorded by two sources. While Bangladesh was being declared, the Yahya government was falling, and a new constitution was prepared to be announced via the state media.²⁵ Two brigadiers were sent to Roedad Khan's office telling him this announcement was not to be made.²⁶ When it first came up, he refused to obey.²⁷ That night, when Lieutenant General Gul Hasan phoned him with the same order, Khan informed President Yahya Khan, who then

²⁰Syed Badrul Ahsan, "Roedad Khan and Post 1971," *The Financial Express* (Bangladesh), 2023.

²¹Siddiqi, *East Pakistan*, 102.

²²Ahsan, "Roedad Khan and Post 1971."

²³Mahmood, "Roedad Khan – A Man For All Seasons."

²⁴Ahsan, "Roedad Khan and Post 1971."

²⁵Mubashir Hasan, *The Mirage of Power: An Inquiry into the Bhutto Years, 1971–1977* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2000), 5.

²⁶Siddiqi, *East Pakistan*, 211–212.

²⁷Khan, *Pakistan: A Dream Gone Sour*, 32.

said: ‘*Do as Gul Hasan says.*’²⁸ He did as he was told and the scheduled 7 p.m. broadcast was canceled due to technical reasons.²⁹ The episode is important for two reasons: firstly, it is independently confirmed and corroborated by both Mubashir Hasan and Kasuri, and one of the most reliably corroborated episodes of army pressure on civil administration in Pakistan’s published history; and secondly, it shows the extent of Roedad Khan’s institutional resistance the limit was as far as two brigadiers but once brought to the call of a lieutenant-general, it was over.³⁰

Administering Political Repression (1978–1988)

Zia nominated Roedad Khan as the Secretary of Interior Ministry. In his memoirs *Pakistan: A Dream Gone Sour*, Khan mentions that he had been told by Ghulam Ishaq Khan that he was to be appointed and subsequently met with Zia at GHQ to receive instructions. He was told precisely what Gen. Zia ul Haq had in mind and how he was going to do it. Roedad stated that Zia’s style was unique as compared to Ayub Khan and Yahya Khan. He was “down-to-earth and has business-like”³¹ mindset having clear agenda and he exactly know how to carry it out. During Zia’s period, there was no change in the political power structure. His administration controlled the coercive forces of the Pakistani state with heavy hands, and it was handled by Roedad Khan all along.³²

Roedad Khan was the biggest fish in the Interior Ministry pond, as he was the man in charge of law enforcement, intelligence agencies such as IB and FIA, and all the paramilitary forces during the martial law era of General Zia-ul-Haq.³³ It was not mere an administrative role, but rather a crucial link in the regime’s political apparatus, a position of power that was based exclusively on institutional position and regime loyalty.³⁴ The best proof of this position is found in Benazir Bhutto’s own account in her memoirs, *Daughter of the East*, how the Interior Ministry carried

²⁸Hasan, *The Mirage of Power*, 4.

²⁹Siddiqi, *East Pakistan*, 212.

³⁰Hasan, *The Mirage of Power*, 5 and Khurshid Mahmud Kasuri, *Neither a Hawk Nor a Dove: An Insider's Account of Pakistan's Foreign Policy* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2015), 817, Both sources independently corroborate this episode.

³¹Khan, *Pakistan: A Dream Gone Sour*, 84.

³²Mahmood, “Roedad Khan – A Man For All Seasons.”

³³Rizvi, *Military, State and Society in Pakistan*, 178.

³⁴Mahmood, “Roedad Khan – A Man For All Seasons.”

out centrally coordinated attacks against the PPP through the use of provincial administration that acted as a tool for pressure on party activists, the bugging of phones, and the practice of invasive surveillance.³⁵

The most debated incident involving the direct involvement of Roedad Khan during the Zia era is the execution of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto on 4 April 1979, after a trial that has always been described as “farcical” and “judicially and procedurally flawed”³⁶ by the international legal community. Roedad Khan’s memoirs say: “The execution was a cold; calculated decision made without any consideration to the long-term negative consequences.”³⁷ This was one of the few admissions where Khan did not claim ignorance or distance himself. In the preface of his book, after a direct interview with Roedad, Stanley Wolpert describes the judicial execution as a foreknown event, in which the civilian administrative apparatus played a part.³⁸ The judiciary, the top bureaucracy and the military-intelligence hierarchy were involved in the whole process of judicial murder, and Roedad Khan cannot be held out of the fray.³⁹

In 1983, the Movement for Restoration of Democracy (MRD), widespread in the Sindh province, was a rude shock for the administration. It was a militant rural movement in the interior Sindh, which involved mass arson and attacks on government officials in thatta, Dadu, Larkana and Sanghar. The movement was led by the PPP and Rasul Bux Palejo's peasant-based Sindhi Awami Tehrik. It was a "volcanic" threat in the rural areas and reached a "climax". The state responded with an "iron hand": three divisions of the army were deployed, and gunship helicopters were used to put down the rebellion. The official death toll had reached 60 and the number of injuries stood at 691, but unofficial figures had put the numbers at more than 300 with some historical records at 800 before the upsurge was quelled in

³⁵Benazir Bhutto, *Daughter of the East: An Autobiography* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2007), 87, 114.

³⁶Hamid Khan, *Constitutional and Political History of Pakistan*, 341.

³⁷Khan, *Pakistan: A Dream Gone Sour*, 86.

³⁸Stanley Wolpert, *Zulfi Bhutto of Pakistan: His Life and Times* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 6.

³⁹Mahmood, “Roedad Khan – A Man For All Seasons.”

January 1984.⁴⁰ His ministry continued to be the main tool to control mass arrests and the frequent issuance of strict orders to restrict movement of opposition leaders across the province. Three divisions of army and gunship helicopters were also used.⁴¹ Khan's decade long service demonstrates the ways in which one can convert a senior position in an authoritarian government into a tool of political repression.

Roedad Khan utilized his office to turn military's decisions into institutional actions and was the senior civil official responsible for the suppression of the MRD movement.⁴² In his biography, Khan wrote that he himself recommended and headed a Joint Security Committee, comprising the heads of the Intelligence Bureau (IB), ISI and all the provincial Home Secretaries, to keep a check on the law-and-order situation and "anticipate events" pertaining to MRD's agitation in 1983.⁴³

The federal civil service was the medium of Zia's Islamization programme, which stayed operational in the form of policy prescriptions and instructions, such as the Hudood Ordinances, amendments to the blasphemy law, the compulsory collection of Zakat and the attendant requirements in government institutions. The coordinating body for provincial administration and law enforcement was the Interior Ministry.⁴⁴ Roedad Khan in his memoir said that Zia never minded if his friends or cronies did not join him for prayer; this moderate portrait of Zia is contradicted and against the intolerance Zia showed for the progressive circle of society. The statement is self-serving and a try to distance himself from the harsh consequences of the policies he administered during his tenure.⁴⁵

⁴⁰Naumana Kiran Imran, "Composition and Working of the Federal Cabinet of Pakistan: Zia ul Haq Era, 1977–1988," *Pakistan Journal of History and Culture* 44, no. 2 (2023): 20-21.

⁴¹Khan, *Pakistan: A Dream Gone Sour*, 89 and Naumana Kiran, "Federal Cabinet of Pakistan: Role in Political Restructuring and Centre-Province Relations, 1977-1999," *Pakistan Partition Politics and Society* Edited Naumana Kiran (Lahore: Vanguard Books, 2025), 126.

⁴²Mahmood, "Roedad Khan – A Man For All Seasons."

⁴³Khan, *Pakistan: A Dream Gone Sour*, 89.

⁴⁴Mahmood, "Roedad Khan – A Man For All Seasons."

⁴⁵Masood Akhtar Zahid, *Dictatorship in Pakistan: A Study of the Zia Era (1977–88)* (Islamabad: National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research, n.d.), 4; Khan, *Pakistan: A Dream Gone Sour*, 81.

The Pakistani Establishment, a loose political structure comprising a triad of army, high bureaucracy and landed elite creates a structural base to understand the behaviour of higher officials like Roedad Khan. To belong to this self-perpetuating network is not enough to win a post; they need to be loyal to certain principles, and sometimes people are excluded from real authority because of their loyalty to those principles.⁴⁶ In this sense, senior civil servants are not just a tool of the military's decision-making, but they are active players in the process of formulating policy, who constitute the "bureaucratic-military oligarchy"⁴⁷ that is the chief agent of policy formulation and enjoys the institutional advantages of political control.

The Democratic Transition and Political Engineering (1988–1993)

Zia-ul-Haq, by the Revival of the Constitution of 1973 Order 1985, through a change in the nature of the country's constitution, introduced the Eighth Amendment in the Constitution of Pakistan. It altered the parliamentary nature of Pakistan by giving to the President of Pakistan a discretionary power in dissolving the National Assembly under Article 58(2)(b) of the Constitution.⁴⁸ The provision was widely used for the removal of four elected governments, 1985 to 1996. This provision further set a rule that representative institutions were subordinate to the the President and the Army Chief.⁴⁹ The months leading to each of the dismissals saw a process of administrative preparations, where corruption and misconduct charges were recorded meticulously and close coordination was established between provincial governors and the federal civil bureaucracy, all while serving as a legalistic euphemism for the operation of the president's whim.⁵⁰

The general elections in November 1988 saw the victory of Benazir Bhutto's PPP and she became the first woman to lead the government of Pakistan and in any Muslim country as Prime Minister on 2 December 1988.⁵¹ Her

⁴⁶Stephen Philip Cohen, *The Idea of Pakistan* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2004), 68–70, 124.

⁴⁷Ayesha Siddiqi, *Military Inc.: Inside Pakistan's Military Economy*, 2nd ed. (London: Pluto Press, 2017), 7–8, 60.

⁴⁸Rizvi, *Military, State and Society in Pakistan*, 187.

⁴⁹Talbot, *Pakistan: A Modern History*, p. 287 and Cohen, *The Idea of Pakistan*, 10.

⁵⁰Rizvi, *Military, State and Society in Pakistan*, 208–209.

⁵¹Talbot, *Pakistan: A Modern History*, 293.

government was constantly besieged by the army, ISI and President Ghulam Ishaq Khan. Her memoir details the concerted attack on her government by the establishment, including those who worked within the Interior machinery.⁵²

Roedad Khan was a key figure in this structure, being appointed with the position of the Secretary General of the Interior Ministry who was tasked to ensure his presence in the ministry beyond his normal retirement date, from 17 August 1988 to 6 August 1990.⁵³ In that portfolio, Khan played a major role in the “secret establishment” that worked the levers of pressure in the state, during certain episodes, like “Operation Midnight Jackals,” which was an ISI planned operation in October 1989 to force the resignation of the government by horse trading the members of the PPP.⁵⁴ It was his management of internal security and civil intelligence that gave his ministry the tools to record the charges of corruption and law-and-order failure that would be brought to bear against Bhutto’s eventual ouster.⁵⁵ His own memoir shows that Khan was informed of the President’s “fateful decision” to remove the government by July 1990 while Bhutto was “blissfully ignorant of the axe which was about to fall.”⁵⁶

On 6 August 1990 Benazir Bhutto’s first government was forced to step down from power by President Ghulam Ishaq Khan. The Mehrangate scandal that broke during judicial proceedings in 1994 uncovered that the ISI had handed out around 1.4 crores from Mehran Bank to political parties and candidates of Islami Jamhoori Ittehad to stop the PPP from returning to power in the general elections of October 1990.⁵⁷ In 1994, former ISI Director General Lieutenant General (retd.) Asad Durrani under Supreme Court oath confirmed that these distributions were

⁵²Bhutto, *Daughter of the East*, 328.

⁵³Aurangzeb Khan, “Herald Exclusive: The Whole Roedad,” *Dawn*, February 25, 2015.

<https://herald.dawn.com/news/1152994>

⁵⁴Rizvi, *Military, State and Society in Pakistan*, 208 and Talbot, *Pakistan: A Modern History*, 309.

⁵⁵Mahmood, “Roedad Khan – A Man For All Seasons” and Rizvi, *Military, State and Society in Pakistan*, 209.

⁵⁶Khan, *Pakistan: A Dream Gone Sour*, 109.

⁵⁷Rizvi, *Military, State and Society in Pakistan*, 209 and Hassan Abbas, *Pakistan’s Drift into Extremism: Allah, the Army, and America’s War on Terror* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2005), 142.

made with the approval of the Army Chief, General Mirza Aslam Beg, and instructions from an election cell operating at the Presidency.⁵⁸

During this time, Roedad Khan's name was connected to a supposed election cell operating from the Presidency which was believed to have overseen political intelligence and campaigning against the Pakistan People's Party.⁵⁹ He categorically rejected any personal involvement: "That's a monstrous lie."⁶⁰ Historical record says that he held an institutional post as Secretary General to the Ministry of Interior, which was in the inner circle of the presidential circle that authorized the Mehrangate payments and dismissed the government of Benazir Bhutto.⁶¹ He was caretaker federal minister and a close confidante of the president and thus he must bear responsibility of the Mehrangate scandal and the handling of the election in October 1990.⁶² Roedad Khan was appointed as Federal Minister for Accountability on 6 August 1990, the same day President Ghulam Ishaq Khan dismissed Benazir Bhutto's first government. It created an institutional linkage between the dismissal and the subsequent legal attacks on the PPP leadership.⁶³ On 11 August 1990, immediately after the dissolution, Khan was sworn in as Federal Minister for Accountability, whose job was to prepare formal corruption references against Bhutto and Asif Ali Zardari to justify their removal and seek their political disqualification.⁶⁴ Throughout this period his career has been, therefore, one of the most visible examples of the use of the office of senior bureaucracy to manage the constitutional coups of the 1990s.⁶⁵

After retiring as a civil servant, Roedad Khan became caretaker Federal Minister of Interior under President Ghulam Ishaq Khan in 1993 during the acute constitutional crisis which resulted in the mutual dismissal and resignation of both

⁵⁸M. Asghar Khan, *We've Learnt Nothing from History: Pakistan: Politics and Military Power* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2005), 287.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 157.

⁶⁰Aurangzaib Khan, "The Whole Roedad."

⁶¹Asghar Khan, *We Have Learnt Nothing from History*, 285.

⁶²Mahmood, "Roedad Khan – A Man For All Seasons."

⁶³Aurangzaib Khan, "The Whole Roedad."

⁶⁴Khan, *Pakistan: A Dream Gone Sour*, 142–144 and Aurangzaib Khan, "The Whole Roedad."

⁶⁵Talbot, *Pakistan: A Modern History*, 287.

the then President and Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.⁶⁶ Hamid Khan stated that such ministerial changes in the constitutional turmoil of early 1990s were part and parcel of the constitutional circus in which the administration was prepared to remove and replace elected governments in its results.⁶⁷ His political involvement in the Ghulam Ishaq Khan's government during this time was therefore tightly linked with, and an enabling tool for, the government's political activities, and his senior appointments were seen as being direct instruments of executive policy.⁶⁸

Post-Retirement Criticism

Roedad Khan was a public figure known for his advocacy of democracy and criticism of military involvement in the politics of Pakistan from the late 1990s until his death in 2024. In his memoir, he had criticized the control of constitutional governance, the dominance of military establishment over the elected governments and institutional degeneration of the State, pointing the fact that the original dream of Pakistan had been twisted by "predatory kleptocrats" and military dictators.⁶⁹ He wrote opinion columns for *Dawn* on civilian supremacy, judicial independence, constitutional accountability, and the need for the army to be removed from the pot of political unrest and conflict to ensure the survival of the federation. His television appearances (including on Geo TV) made him an insider witness to the excesses of the regimes he had served; later in public appearances, he described his action as based on principles or disagreement.⁷⁰ Khan publicly criticized Musharraf's 1999 coup and right away termed it as a "day of infamy" and an "assault on democracy" that had rendered Pakistan a "slave state."⁷¹ He became a bold activist for human rights in his later years, an active member of the campaign for the restoration of the Judiciary in 2007 and became an official member of the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf

⁶⁶Ikram Junaidi, "Roedad Khan," *Dawn*, 22 April 2024.

⁶⁷Hamid Khan, *Constitutional and Political History of Pakistan*, 425.

⁶⁸Mahmood, "Roedad Khan – A Man For All Seasons"; Ahsan, "Roedad Khan."

⁶⁹Khan, *Pakistan: A Dream Gone Sour*, 151, 168.

⁷⁰Ahsan, "Roedad Khan."

⁷¹Roedad Khan, *Pakistan: A Slave State*, vol. II (n.p., n.d.), 116.

https://sanipanhwar.com/uploads/books/2024-08-28_10-48-08_dd707569e9299a29a5ebad14cf66ca7c.pdf

(PTI) with hope that the younger generation would live up to Jinnah's vision of the country.⁷²

Roedad Khan's public image as a democratic advocate was constantly challenged and pointed at, primarily in the assessment of *The Friday Times* which was published after his death. The article describes him as "a hypocrite of the first order" who worked for one of the most brutal military dictators of Pakistan and was "part and parcel of all these shenanigans and intrigues." The challenge says that he only took to the slogan of democracy and the rule of law "when he had feathered his nest, received plots, bungalows and other 'perquisites of office' during Zia's rule."⁷³ This critique is borne out by institutionalized rewards, such as the Zia years' provision of urban real estate and rural land to the "civil-military combine" to build a power base for the regime.⁷⁴

The challenge is structurally sound, irrespective of his own level of sincerity. Being the head of the Interior Ministry for a decade under a martial law regime during which the political opposition was relentlessly suppressed, and the head of the coercive apparatus that did the job, cannot possibly be reconciled with democratic credentials unless he faces the record of his own institutional conduct.⁷⁵ In the academic study *Dictatorship in Pakistan: A Study of the Zia Era (1977–88)*, Khan's post-dictatorial accounts of a more moderate Zia were mostly used to remove him from the noxious implications of the repressive regime he governed.⁷⁶ He eventually came to be viewed as an official who compromised his soul for worldly advantages and promotion rather than defended the constitution.⁷⁷

Assessment of Roedad Khan's Role in Power Politics

Pakistan's power politics can be evaluated on five distinct and documented bases of Roedad Khan's role in the politics of Pakistan.

⁷²Mahmood, "Roedad Khan – A Man For All Seasons"; Junaidi, "Roedad Khan," *Dawn*, 22 April 2024.

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴Siddiq, *Military Inc.*, 181, 235.

⁷⁵Mahmood, "Roedad Khan – A Man For All Seasons"; Talbot, *Pakistan: A Modern History*, 287.

⁷⁶Zahid, *Dictatorship in Pakistan*, 4.

⁷⁷Mahmood, "Roedad Khan – A Man For All Seasons."

Firstly, as an information controller, he was the first Managing Director of PTV and then Secretary of Information in the 1971 crisis, under the leadership of Yahya Khan. In the run-up to Operation Searchlight, the expulsion of foreign journalists was a coordinated administrative manoeuvre, confirmed by both Sisson and Rose and by Choudhury. Siddiqi's firsthand account places him at the Dhaka cantonment on the morning of 26 March 1971, where he expressed satisfaction at the military action. This evidence directly contradicts a retrospective claim he made that he had been advising a political solution.

Second, as the head of state repression, he held the post of Federal Secretary Interior under Zia ul-Haq (16 September 1978 – 17 August 1988), which was responsible for law and order, civil intelligence, the FIA, all paramilitary forces, press censorship and the administration of the political control system. This ministry was responsible for the political suppression operations carried out during the Zia decade, such as flogging, arresting, monitoring, banning travel and restricting political activity. In her memoir, Benazir Bhutto clearly shows how this machinery was used to quell the PPP.

Thirdly, as a tool of political persecution, his appointment as Minister of Accountability on the same date Benazir Bhutto's government was dismissed, and the preparation of corruption cases against her and Asif Ali Zardari, constitutes a direct and documented connection between the political dismissal of an elected prime minister and the subsequent legal campaign against her. Wolpert, who interviewed him firsthand for the Bhutto biography, describes the civilian administrative system as complicit with the politically driven handling of opposition figures.

Fourth, as a proximate participant in electoral engineering. The president who ordered the Mehrangate distributions had him in his circle of trust as Secretary General of the Interior Ministry, placing him within the structure that coordinated the 1990 electoral manipulation. He is accused of personally taking part in particular electoral operations but there is no independent proof. In this system where power was exercised through informal personal networks instead of formal paper trails, it is often difficult from the documentary record alone to draw the line between being in the room and being on the hook.

Fifth, as a post-retirement actor in political discourse, he officially affiliated with a political party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf. He made himself a familiar figure portraying himself as an insider critic of military involvement in politics in his memoirs, newspaper columns, and television broadcasts, and he earned a reputation as a democratic champion. His accounts were seen by historian Stanley Wolpert, who interviewed him firsthand and considered them key historical evidence. While his criticism of authoritarian politics was indeed a valid one, his account of the events was also selective, as he ignored his own contribution to the political conditions he condemned. Nonetheless, his testimony provides a valuable part of the historical record of the Zia period and the political crises of the 1990s, when it is also corroborated by other evidence.

Conclusion

Roedad Khan's career highlights how the higher officials of the Pakistani bureaucracy became so entangled in Pakistan's power politics following independence. He was not merely a neutral civil servant whose job was to carry out administrative tasks but became an important institutional figure who was frequently tied to the business of the intelligence service, of internal security, and of political management.

Roedad Khan was constantly involved with the process of power in the Karachi disturbances of 1965, the crisis of 1971, the coercive apparatus of the Zia dictatorship, constitutional dismissals and political engineering of the 1990s. He received power to control information, manage the law, coordinate intelligence, monitor and regulate surveillance, and keep track of accountability procedures, all of which were important in maintaining authoritarian political systems. The career trajectory of his life shows that the authority of the bureaucracy in Pakistan was often deployed not just to govern the state but also in a way that highlighted the repression of opposition, shaping political results and offering continuity to unelected centers of power.

The documentation of his involvement also shows a consistent pattern of minimizing or shifting institutional responsibility in post hoc narratives, a pattern even though significant documentation exists at the time of events in which he was involved in the functioning of coercive state policies. This image was starkly

different from the roles he had played during the most contentious political events in Pakistan's history, as his stance on democracy, constitutionalism and civilian supremacy stood in contrast to these roles. His critique of the role of military force in politics was well received among democrats, but this did not completely distance his name from the systems of repression and control he had helped contribute to.

In the end, career of Roedad Khan mirrors the overall pattern of the praetorian system in Pakistan, where military, high-ranking bureaucracy and executive powers were all closely interconnected. His career shows that the higher civil service was by no means an outside force to the political sphere, but it was also an integral part of the state apparatus by which political power was used, defended and maintained in the face of shifting political climates and regimes.

Bibliography

- Abbas, Hassan. *Pakistan's Drift into Extremism: Allah, the Army, and America's War on Terror*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2005.
- Ahsan, Syed Badrul. "Roedad Khan and Post 1971." *The Financial Express* (Bangladesh), 2023.
- Ansari, Sarfaraz Hussain, and Fatima Bajwa. "Higher Bureaucracy in Pakistan: An Historical Analysis of Praise and Blame." *ISSRA Papers* 11, no. 1 (2019): 81–87.
- Bhutto, Benazir. *Daughter of the East: An Autobiography*. London: Simon & Schuster, 2007.
- Choudhury, G. W. *The Last Days of United Pakistan*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1974.
- Cohen, Stephen Philip. *The Idea of Pakistan*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2004.
- Gauhar, Altaf. *Ayub Khan: Pakistan's First Military Ruler*. Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1993.
- Hasan, Mubashir. *The Mirage of Power: An Inquiry into the Bhutto Years, 1971–1977*. Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Junaidi, Ikram. "Roedad Khan." *Dawn*, April 22, 2024.
- Kasuri, Khurshid Mahmud. *Neither a Hawk Nor a Dove: An Insider's Account of Pakistan's Foreign Policy*. Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Khan, Aurangzeb. "Herald Exclusive: The Whole Roedad." *Dawn*, February 25, 2015. <https://herald.dawn.com/news/1152994>.
- Khan, Hamid. *Constitutional and Political History of Pakistan*. Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Khan, M. Asghar. *We've Learnt Nothing from History: Pakistan: Politics and Military Power*. Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Khan, Roedad. *Pakistan: A Dream Gone Sour*. Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Khan, Roedad. *Pakistan: A Slave State*. Vol. II. N.p., n.d. https://sanipanhwar.com/uploads/books/2024-08-28_10-48-08_dd707569e9299a29a5ebad14cf66ca7c.pdf.
- Kiran, Naumana. "Composition and Working of the Federal Cabinet of Pakistan: Zia ul Haq Era, 1977–1988." *Pakistan Journal of History and Culture* 44, no. 2 (2023): 20–21.
- Kiran, Naumana. "Federal Cabinet of Pakistan: Role in Political Restructuring and Centre-Province Relations, 1977–1999." In *Pakistan Partition Politics and Society*, edited by Naumana Kiran, 126. Lahore: Vanguard Books, 2025.
- Mahmood, Parvez. "Roedad Khan—A Man for All Seasons." *The Friday Times*, April 2024.

- Rizvi, Hassan Askari. *Military, State and Society in Pakistan*. Lahore: Progressive Publishers, 2000.
- Shaikh, Irfan Ahmed. *Bureaucracy: Max Weber's Concept and Its Application to Pakistan*. Lahore: Progressive Publishers, 2014.
- Siddiqi, Ayesha. *Military Inc.: Inside Pakistan's Military Economy*. 2nd ed. London: Pluto Press, 2017.
- Siddiqi, Abdul-Rahman. *East Pakistan: The Endgame—An Onlooker's Journal, 1969–1971*. Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2017.
- Sisson, Richard, and Leo E. Rose. *War and Secession: Pakistan, India, and the Creation of Bangladesh*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.
- Talbot, Ian. *Pakistan: A Modern History*. London: Hurst & Company, 2005.
- Weber, Max. *Economy and Society*. Edited and translated by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978.
- Wolpert, Stanley. *Zulfi Bhutto of Pakistan: His Life and Times*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Zahid, Masood Akhtar. *Dictatorship in Pakistan: A Study of the Zia Era (1977–88)*. Islamabad: National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research, n.d.