

MODEL BAZAARS REDEFINED: PUNJAB'S VISIONARY STEP TO AUTHORITY STATUS FOR PUBLIC WELFARE

Naveed Razaqat Ahmad

Punjab Model Bazaars Management Company

nrahmad@live.com

Abstract:

The Punjab Model Bazaars project presents an astonishing example of government interventions formulated to better the lives of everyday citizens. Amid the rising inflation and economic difficulties, the Model Bazaars have appeared as a symbol of affordability, stability and social equity, offering essential goods at prices that are prominently lower than the market rates. The recent decision to transform the Punjab Model Bazaar Management Company (PMBMC) to an authority model provides a remarkable shift in the works of this influential initiative, reinforcing its position as one of the most significant public welfare projects in Pakistan. The qualitative method is employed in the research process using the techniques of interviews, surveys and focus groups to attain a better insight. The findings reveal the transition of Model Bazaars to authority model has provided several benefits like improved governance, public trust, financial independence, enhanced service delivery and sustainable framework contributing to socio-economic development in Punjab.

Key words: Punjab Model Bazaar, Authority, Transformation, Sustainability, Public Welfare

1. Introduction:

The Punjab Model Bazaars Management Company (PMBMC) is a public sector organization formulated under Section 42 of the Companies Ordinance 1984, and it operates under the Price Control and Commodities Management Department (PCCMD), which works as its administrative system.

The initiative of Model Bazaars is a special program of Punjab government that aims to promote public welfare by providing essential daily life products in a very decent and respectful environment mostly at District Collector rates. These Bazaars ensure that customers have access to daily items at very affordable and competitive prices, all available within a clean and well organized space. The additional facilities include play areas, food courts, prayer rooms and other facilities like clean washrooms.

The main objective of Model Bazaars is not only centered towards providing goods at affordable prices but also to provide a platform for the lower and middle-class entrepreneurs to run their businesses in a distinguished manner. These entrepreneurs are provided with stalls for a minimum monthly rent, allowing around 15,000 people to earn a respectful living. The customers and stallholders are further facilitated with free electricity, parking area, shopping carts, clean drinking water and security services. Due to this distinctive and respectful environment and top notch services, Model Bazaars attract approximately 50 million visitors on annual basis and this number is growing significantly with the passage of time.

The renowned success of these Model Bazaars has encouraged the management to expand its boundaries and give even better services to the public. It is worth noticing that PMBMC is focused on establishing bazaars in insufficiently areas of southern Punjab. In response to their immense popularity among customers, the Punjab government has decided to expand the initiative by developing Model Bazaars in 142 tehsils across the province and making sure that they stay open 7 days a week to provide immense services and relief to consumers.

The prominent stakeholders of Model Bazaars have played a significant role in transforming PMBMC into a booming organization. Their intellectual leadership has led to the expansion of Model Bazaars into 13 other districts, providing the access to affordable items in remote areas.

This growth was further supported by successful negotiation of PKR 2.5 billion in government funding and free land allocations. They also employed solar power to reduce the electricity cost. One of his key innovation includes the Kisan Platform which directly connects the farmers with consumes, stabilizing the prices of food items and empowering the agricultural sector as well.

1.1 The functions of Model Bazaars:

The Punjab Model Bazaar Management Company (PMBMC) works as self-sustained organization, depending on the savings generated from its bazaars to cover the operational expenses, including the utility bills, staff salaries and other routine maintenance expenditure. The company does not take additional funds from the finance department or the government for these expenses. PMBMC receives a one-time grant-in-aid to develop and construct new Model Bazaars and other related facilities.

Along with the availability of essential goods, Model Bazaars provide recreational facilities for the children at affordable prices, ranging from Rs. 20 to Rs. 60. The profits generated from the more stable and successful bazaars are used to support those that are financially less stable. It is important to note that these bazaars are separate from those controlled and operated by local governments like Sunday, Friday and Ramzan Bazaars.

At the moment that are 36 Model Bazaars operating across various cities in Punjab, including Lahore (Township, Thokar Niaz Baig, Harbanspura, Sabzazaar, Raiwind, Mian Plaza-Johar Town, Sher Shah Colony, Chung, Wahdat Colony & China Scheme), Rawalpindi, Sargodha, Kasur, Bahawalpur, Sialkot, Sahiwal, Faisalabad (Jhang Road & Millat Road), Toba Tek Singh, Gujranwala, Gujrat, Jampur, Bhera, Dera Ghazi Khan, Layyah, Hafizabad, Farooqabad, Chakwal, Lodhran, Jhang, Vehari, Jauharabad, Mianwali, Pakpattan, Bhakkar, and Taunsa Sharif. These bazaars serve a wide range of customers every day, providing affordable services and good quality products while providing their share to the local economy.

1.2 The Shift to Authority Mode:

The transformation of PMBMC from a company to an authority model is more significant than mere an administrative change and it is a planned move to grow the initiative to a level of global recognition and there are some key factors which are very helpful for this kind of transition mainly based on the recent growth.

- **Institutional Strength and Credibility** the authority status will provide Model Bazaars greater autonomy resulting in more effective governance and swift decision making. This improved credibility will also seek the attention of international donors, partnerships and private sector investments which will broaden the project's reach and effect.
- **Scalability and Long-Term Vision** The allocation of PKR 3.4 billion from the government indicates a firm decision of expanding the initiative of Model Bazaars to more cities. Transition to authority mode provides the framework required for strategic growth allowing equal access of these facilities across other regions in Punjab.
- **Innovation in Service Delivery** The authority status will help the Model Bazaars to implement advanced solutions like digital payment methods, advanced inventory record and direct farmer to consumer services. These improvements will enhance the consumer experience completely, establishing the bazaars as model for other provinces and countries.
- **Operational Efficiency** The increased sovereignty will provide the authority to eliminate the bureaucratic hurdles, hiring on merit basis and adoption of clean procurement

practices. This will result in maintaining the bazaars' efficiency while making sure they continue to provide affordable and quick services to consumers.

- **Developing Public Trust** The most important advantage of authority model is the enhancement of public trust. By the implementation of oversight methods, the government can reassure citizens that their service is the top priority, protected from political and administrative factors.

1.3 Research questions:

Q:1 How the transition of Punjab Model Bazaars to authority model will improve the operational efficiency, mainly in terms of service delivery and governance?

Q:2 How the transition from a company model to authority model will affect the accessibility of essential items to lower and middle class consumers in Punjab?

Q:3 How does the working structure of PMBMC authority model differ from its previous company model and what are the significant benefits of it?

1.4 Significance of study:

The present study is important because it shows the impact of transition of Model Bazaars from company model to authority model. The finding of the study will be helpful for the researchers working in the same field of research. The transition of Punjab Model bazaars from company model to an authority model is very significant due to its potential strength to set new standards for public welfare at both local and global platforms. This transition shows a strategic step that will improve the operational efficiency and financial stability, allowing the initiative to serve millions of customers throughout Punjab region. With the financial support from government and clear motive to serve the customers with top notch services, the Model Bazaars not only provide essential items at competitive prices but also implement some advanced solutions like digital payment methods and direct farmer to consumer platforms. This transformation stands as a model of effective governance, public-private partnerships and a long term commitment to social equity, creating a lasting and improved impact on both the economy and the lives of everyday consumers belonging to lower and middle classes.

1.5 Hypotheses:

- The transition from company mode to authority mode will significantly improve the operational efficiency of Punjab Model bazaars, leading to faster decision making, better services and higher rate of customer satisfaction.
- The shift to an authority model will improve the public trust in the Model Bazaars initiatives by employing independent oversight mechanisms and reducing the political and administrative interferences in its working procedures.
- The implementation of innovative ideas such as digital payment method, smart inventory management and farmer to consumer platform will lead to an immense increase in the availability and affordability of essential goods in Model bazaars across Punjab.

1.6 Delimitation of the study:

The study will be limited to the Punjab region of Pakistan, mainly focusing on the Model Bazaars located in the 13 districts that have been developed under the leadership of major stakeholders. This includes the examination of the impact of transition to authority model within these specific districts and does not extend to other regions of Pakistan. The prime focus of the study will be on the beneficiaries of the Model Bazaars, including the lower and middle class customers, local farmer and employees of PMBMC. It will exclude other socioeconomic groups or other affluent groups outside the influence of Model Bazaar initiative. The study will address

the shift of Model Bazaars from company model to authority model as a political decision and it will not explore in depth the political climate in Punjab region or the political scenario of the government instead focusing on the operational and governance aspects of the model Bazaar initiative.

1.7 Data Collection:

Data collection for the study will involve a qualitative method to interpret the impact of transition of Punjab Model Bazaars to authority model. Primary data will be gathered through interviews, focus groups and in-depth observations with the key stake holders including the government officials, PMBMC employees, local farmers, consumers and community leaders in the 13 districts where the Model Bazaars have expanded to collect authentic, firsthand and valid insight into the impact of transition to an authority model.

Semi structured interviews will be performed to explore the perception of leadership, operational innovation and consumer experiences, allowing the participants to share their views on the innovations introduced such as the kisan Platform and solar power integration to reduce the electricity cost. Focus group will be organized with local customers and farmers to discuss how these innovations have affected their access to affordable goods, market stability and overall quality of life. Additionally, the participant based observations will be carried out at selected Model Bazaar locations to understand how the innovations and leadership changes are being implemented in practices and to attain the direct reviews of the community with these new innovations and practices. The data collected will be analyzed thematically to identify the common pattern, the perceptions and concerns, providing a deep understanding of the social, operational and governance impacts of the authority transition. This detailed approach will allow a complete understanding of the outcomes of the authority transition and its effects on public welfare and community development.

2. Literature review:

For most part of 70-years of history, Pakistan was considered as an agrarian society. At the time of independence in 1947, approximately 84% of the population lived in rural areas which constitute a larger number of people. The main source of economy was dominantly based on agriculture, which contributed to approximately 60% of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) (State Bank 2015:3). So ultimately the early policies mainly focused on the rural life, poverty and the social tendency of agrarian class patterns. (Javed, 2018)

The structural transition of Pakistan's economy in the time period of last few decades is evident in its shifting economic landscape. The manufacturers and services all combined together make up the 76% percent of the country's GDP and employ 60% of the total workforce (State Bank 2015: 7,81). Within the urban economy, the services sector solely contributes 54% to GDP and provides the chances of employment to 40% of the working population. In comparison to this, employment in the manufacturing sector has remained relatively the same at about 20% since 1980. As a result, the services sector has played a more significant role in gaining labor from the rural areas which is a key feature of urban growth over the time period of past 30 years. The services sector is further divided into various sub-sectors, each with a notable difference in employment generation and value production. Among these sectors, the retail and the wholesale trade or simply the bazaar sector is the largest and plays a prominent role in the economy of Pakistan. (Javed, 2018)

The bazaar sector, which the focal point of this research work currently contributes 18.4% to Pakistan's total GDP and provides the opportunities of employment to approximately 18% of Pakistan's labor force with 41% of the working population in urban areas engaged in this sector. While the overall economic growth has averaged only 3.5% over the past years the retail-wholesale sector has experienced a real time growth rate of nearly 6% during the same time period. The sector's estimated value is around USD 42 billion, with annual sales reaching USD 155 billion across 1.3 million establishments. From these figures, it is evident that Pakistan's urban reality, whether in large metropolitan cities or in smaller secondary and tertiary towns, remains heavily dependent on a deeply rooted and rapidly expanding bazaar economy. (Javed, 2018)

A significant aspect of the bazaar sector is its prominent part in the growth and expansion of the informal economy. The rise of unregistered businesses utilizing labor on contractual arrangements is an important aspect of late capitalism seen in many regions around the globe. In opposition to some viewpoints, the informal economy has not shrunk in size or spectrum following the relaxations of government regularities and the rise of neo-liberalism. For sure, it has continued to grow along with urban expansions and the strengthening of capitalist patterns. This leads to an ultimate conclusion that in reality the informal and formal sectors are closely interrelated, with both relying on each other through the mutual dependency. (Javed, 2018)

The complexity of Pakistan's capitalist transformation and the rise of different aspects in the service sector economy necessitate a clear identification of the key group. A Bazaar trader, or *tajir* in Urdu, represents a distinct type of actor within the broader commerce and trade sector. Drawing on classifications used in countries like Iran (Keshavarzian 2007), these traders work in specific retail-wholesale bazaar or spaces. In Pakistan, they attain annual turnovers exceeding the taxable threshold of Rs. 5 million, create substantial capital amounts, and often employ labor beyond that which is mostly sourced from their own families. This puts them apart from self-employed craftsmen (*mistri*), street vendors (*thailaywally*) and small shopkeepers (*dukaandar*) placing them in the highest income percentile. (Javed, 2018)

The privileged status of bazaar traders goes far beyond mere rhetorical support and is evident in the everyday functioning of governance. Traders and other businessmen are mostly effective in forming political outcomes and government reforms particularly in the areas like local taxation (Ahmad 2010) and the socio-spatial organization of towns and cities (Ezdi 2009).

In the political sphere, the proportion of legislators elected from Punjab's urban constituencies whose primary occupation is business has risen from 5% in 1970 to nearly 75% by 2013. Overall, businessmen now represent the second largest occupational group in the provincial legislature, following agriculturalists. This figure is likely an underestimate, as many rural elites have also diversified into informal commercial ventures to supplement their agricultural incomes. (Javid 2011: 175)

Traders are increasingly gaining influence. Every alley and bazaar is now organized into various associations. These traders possess 'shutter power.' For instance, if workers in a rural factory with 2000 employees go on a strike, it has little impact. However, if the shopkeepers in Anarkali close their shutter for just two hours, it creates a far more greater impact in the city. Workers have been shifting their allegiances from the PPP to PML because shopkeepers, businessmen and similar figures are able to provide employment opportunities and access to the government. (Wilder 1995: 105)

3. Methodology:

The methodology adopted for this research will be based on qualitative research methods to apprehend the transition of Punjab Model Bazaars from company model to authority model. This methodology will help provide the insight into the perception of various stakeholders involved in the process such as, government officials, PMBMC leaders, farmers, employees and consumers to better understand the changes brought by the transition of Model Bazaars from company model to authority model. The qualitative research will provide a better and thorough exploration of social and operational impacts of the initiative. This study will adopt an exploratory case study design to understand the complexities of the transition of the Punjab Model Bazaars. The case study model is very significant because it provides a detailed analysis of the initiative within an ideal situation. This design will help to understand how the Model bazaars operate under the influence of new authority model, mainly focusing on community experiences, innovative designs, leaderships and other operational changes involved in the process.

The semi-structured interviews will provide the exploration of participants' opinions and experiences related to this transition to authority model. The topics will revolve around digital payment systems, solar power, change in governance, affordability of products, access to products and the community welfare. The interviews will be based on open ended questions with key themes to ensure the validity throughout the interviews while allowing the participant to share their viewpoints freely. The interviews will be analyzed to draw the conclusions. The key stakeholders will be selected based on their involvement and these participants will contain the PMBMC leaders like seniors manager and other staff members that involved in the decision making process of this transition to authority model, government officials from the Punjab government who played their part in funding and supporting the Model Bazaars initiative, local farmers who provide goods to the bazaars and finally there will be the consumers who would provide an insight into their shopping experience, satisfaction of services and views about the initiative.

The focus groups will include the local customers and farmers from selected districts where the Model Bazaars have been developed. The groups will contain 6-8 members ensuring the diversity in terms of their socio-economic status, age and gender to capture a broad range of opinions. The focus group will provide the concerns about the overall impact of the Model Bazaars particularly regarding availability of products, prices and the impact of innovations like Kisan Platform. These viewpoints will help to recognize the common themes, areas of satisfaction and other concerns related to changes introduced under the new authority model. The focus groups will be semi-structured revolving around key themes and the facilitators will encourage the participants to share their experiences in the form of a group setting.

The documents will also be analyzed like PMBMC reports, policy documents from the Punjab Government, press reports and other such documents related to the transition of the Model Bazaars into an authority mode. The document analysis will provide important background information on the strategic plans, funding and the official viewpoints regarding the transition. This method will help to contextualize the data attained from the interviews, focus groups and observations to provide a more holistic approach about the governance structure and the possible outcomes of the authority model. The documents will be analyzed for the relevant information about the objectives, financial aids and the plans of implementations and key themes will be taken out to strengthen the findings from other sources.

The qualitative methodology will give rich, contextually valid and grounded insights into the transformation of the Punjab Model Bazaars, mainly focusing on the perceptions, experiences

and the impacts of the transition to authority model. The research will primarily focus on the qualitative data, which may hinder the ability to generalize findings across broader populations. Furthermore, participants' bias may take place as individuals' viewpoints are shaped by their personal experiences which can ultimately influence the success of the Model Bazaar transition to authority model.

4. Data Analysis:

The change of Punjab Model Bazaars from a company model to an authority model has contributed in remarkable improvements in operational efficiency, delivery of services and public relations. This detailed analysis provides important themes derived from the interviews, focus groups, observations and document analysis in order to offer insight into how this transition has impacted different stakeholders. According to these findings, the transition of Model Bazaars has proved as a significant catalyst for good governance, greater accessibility to necessary products, enhanced public trust and a wider community service.

4.1. Enhanced Operational planning:

One of the most important changes resulting from the transition to an authority model is the improvement of operational parameters. The authority model has provided great freedom to Punjab Model Bazaars, creating the decision making process speedy and more flexible. During the previous company model, PMBMC was usually slowed down by the bureaucratic hindrances resulting in slow responses to operational processes like stock shortage, prices fluctuation and delay in services. With the authority model the decision making processes have become swifter, allowing the Model Bazaars to address these issues in a limited time span to improve the overall efficiency of necessary procedures.

4.1.1 Flexibility in decision-making process:

The interviews with the PMBMC leaders and government officials have revealed that the increased sovereignty under the authority model has largely reduced the delays in decision making processes. The ability to act quickly has been very significant while addressing the concerns like stock refilling and pricing adjustments. For instance the farmers and consumers have shown satisfaction with the quicker change in services like stock refilling and more affordable prices. This transformation has also provided the introduction of new services like the kisan Platform which has severely changed the operational procedures by flourishing the relationship between makers and consumers.

4.1.2 Effective governance and transparency:

The enhanced government mechanism under the influence of the authority model is another aspect of the operational efficiency. The freedom of PMBMC has provided the institution to work with lesser political interferences which was previously a key factor in slowing down the decision making process and transparency. The transformation has not only enhanced the independence of the organization but also provided transparent accountability methods resulting in greater trust among the customers and stakeholders. The lesser political influence and clear work operations have allowed PMBMC to work more effectively on delivering the services to customers and meeting the requirements of the market.

4.2. Affordability and accessibility of essential goods:

A key objective of the transition was to improve the affordability and accessibility of essential items for the people of Punjab, especially those belonging to lower and middle classes. The authority model has gained remarkable success in providing the essential items more easily by

regulating a more stable pricing standard and a huge distribution network across the Punjab region.

4.2.1 Price stability:

One of the significant improvements introduced under the authority model is the Kisan Platform, a digital market that directly connects the farmers and the consumers. This platform has played an important role in eradicating the middlemen, thereby lowering the cost of products for the customers. With this direct connection the consumers are able to get fresh products at very affordable prices which are a huge benefit for the lower class people who are adversely affected through price fluctuations. The focus groups, especially those including the lower and middle class people have constantly noted that prices for the ordinary products have reduced due to the elimination of unnecessary markups by the middlemen.

4.2.2 Enhanced accessibility to products:

Other than the affordability, the expansion of Model Bazaars to underprivileged areas, especially in southern Punjab, has largely improved accessibility to essential items. In many rural areas of Southern Punjab, the access to affordable and high-grade products was previously restricted. With the advancement of Model bazaars in 142 tehsils, a large population now takes the advantage of constant supply of essential goods. The document analysis further supports this aspect, showing that governments' financial allowance of PKR 3.4 billion is aimed at enhancing the accessibility and ensuring that these bazaars also reach the remote areas with the passage of time. This financial allocation shows the long term idea for nourishing the quality of life for rural people by giving them the accessibility to affordable products, household items and other essentials of life.

4.3 Innovative delivery services:

The inclusion of advanced technologies and services has been a foundation of the transformation from the company model to the authority model. These innovative steps have placed a significant impact on both the consumer experiences and the operations effectiveness, resulting in improved services across the all the Model Bazaars in Punjab region.

4.3.1 Digital payment methods:

One of the prominent technological improvements introduced under the authority model is the digitally organized payment method. This step has been specifically beneficial for the urban customers, simplifying the transactions and making the shopping experience more enjoyable. In the urban areas where the consumers have more digital knowledge, they have expressed a higher level of satisfaction with the easiness of using the digital payments and other electronically operated transaction methods. However, there are some challenges in implementing this in rural areas due to lesser digital literacy and the limited accessibility to the technology. The older consumers and those who have a very limited exposure to digital technology have mostly faced problem in embracing the digital payment methods, thus showcasing a hurdle to full participation in bazaars. The constant efforts are being made to address these issues through the training and other programs because the digital transformation is the ongoing prominent need of time.

4.3.2 Usage of solar power:

The integration of the solar power has been another prominent innovation into the Model Bazaars. The solar energy has drastically reduced the working cost of running the bazaars, especially in the urban areas where the access to the electricity supply is often unpredictable. The usage of solar panel to power the important services like the lighting, refrigeration and air conditioning have reduced the electricity bills and through this the Model Bazaars have also

contributed to the environmental stability and a reduced dependence on the grid electricity. This innovative step goes with the long term goal of the authority model which hopes to attain the operational effectiveness and environmental responsibilities. Furthermore, the usage of solar energy has contributed in maintaining a constant service delivery during the power cut making sure that the customers can continue shopping and access the products during the harsh conditions.

4.4. Operational and structural innovations in authority model:

The transition to the authority model has also provided the structural changes within the PMBMC especially in sense of organizational sovereignty and staff management. These changes have significantly improved the effectiveness and professional skills of the organization.

4.4.1 Organizational sovereignty:

The PMBMC staff has provided that the enhanced freedom under the authority model has provided the organization to work more efficiently, with swifter decision-making processes and less dependency on the external political aspects. The local government has also shown how the authority model has helped more targeted innovations in regions that were recently underprivileged significantly in regions like southern Punjab. This change in organizational structure has given PMBMC the strength to act more efficiently to local requirements and extend the reach of the Model Bazaars.

4.4.2 Merit-based hiring and promotions:

Another prominent change is the stress on the merit-based hiring and promotions of the staff members. Under the influence of the authority model, the employees show greater morale and job satisfaction, knowing the fact that their career progress is highly dependent on their performance rather than the political associations. This innovation has helped to acquire skilled and qualified individuals to perform their duties at PMBMC, enhancing the overall management and operational ethics of the Model Bazaars across Punjab region.

4.5 Welfare of the community:

The transformation to the authority model has made a useful impact on public trust and community welfare. Through the reduction of political interferences and promoting the transparency, the new authority model has developed stronger relationships between the Model Bazaars and the communities they provide their services to.

4.5.1 Developing the public trust:

The data from the focus groups and the interviews constantly shows the ever growing trust in the Model Bazaars due to the enhanced transparency and reduced political involvement. PMBMC' decision to independent oversight, valid pricing and accountability has established its validity among the consumers, stallholders and the stakeholders. The participants of the focus groups have revealed that they feel more comfortable in the bazaars as they are more reliable and transparent.

4.5.2 Socioeconomic advantages:

The transition to the authority model has a social impact which is very significant for small-scale entrepreneurs, local consumers and farmer. The Model Bazaars have provided a platform for the entrepreneurs and the farmers to showcase their products in fair and well maintained environment which results in increased economic stability. Most of the stallholders have reported enhanced financial stability due to the greater number of sales and access to a constant customer base. Furthermore, through the affordable accessibility to essential products, the Model Bazaars

have greatly served the broader community, making sure that low-income families have access to good quality products.

5. Conclusion:

The transformation of Punjab Model Bazaars from a company model to an authority model has provided a huge impact on the operational services, accessibility of goods, public trust, redefining the approach to governance and public services in the region. The authority model has brought many beneficial changes like swift decision making, more productive governance, and better services for customers, simply providing the benefits to both the stakeholders and the consumers in a promising manner. The key innovations include the Kisan Platform, digital payment methods, and the introduction of solar energy collectively enhanced the sustainability, affordability and the ease of the bazaars mainly for the people having low income and belonging to rural communities. These changes represent a firm commitment to generate a more clear, and efficient marketplace for all the people. The transition is not only a big step for Punjab region but also sets a prime example for other regions that area looking forward to having an improved governance and service system. Under the supervision of intellectual stakeholders and with strong government support the Model Bazaars are going to make bigger achievements in future. This initiative is simply a testament of collective efforts between the government and the stakeholders providing a shining example for millions of people.

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