

# **Exploring the Engagement and Empowerment of Women**

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# 3

## Examining Women Empowerment through Representation in Pakistan

Who Gets to Represent Whom?

Muhammad Usman Amin Siddiqi

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### Introduction

Politics has been defined and understood in as many ways as the academic disciplines are; in its narrower sense to mean art of government or public affairs, and in its wider sense to mean as a game of power, irrespective of level (global, state, local, workplace, family etc.). In order to distinguish criminality from politics, the element of legitimacy is attached with power to mean politics. This legitimacy may come from constitution, law, religion, morality, ethics, or social norms. Therefore, politics can be conceptualized as anything to attain, retain, or exercise of legitimate power offered by law of the land or norms embedded in economic and social configurations of society.

Power is normally defined as an ability to do or get things done. The word comes from Latin, *potere*, which refers to potentiality and means 'to be able'. However, the notion that power is an *ability* to do things is over simplifying, if not misleading. "In its emphasis on concerted agency, the Latin root obscures the significance of power's dispersion, circulation, and microphysical mechanics, its often automatic rather than intentional workings, and its detailed imbrication

with knowledge, language, and thought.”<sup>1</sup> Moreover, considering power a quality undermines its meanings as a relation, especially the one that makes and shapes social order and human subjects. Furthermore, the notion of power as ability is also oppugned by incommensurability between what holder of power intends and what power actually does.

Empowerment refers to conferring legality or sanctioning of legitimate power to an individual or a group. Women empowerment denotes empowering women – not necessarily in terms of achieving power to dominate others but in terms of gaining control over their own lives and securing equal rights to that of men in a given society. The aforementioned complexity attached with the concept of power entails multidimensionality of the concept of women empowerment as well. Women’s empowerment, with its political, economic, social, religious, cultural, psychological, and personal elements, is a fluid and emerging concept; which has been catapulted in significance with feminism and development literature in last quarter of twentieth century. Like the concept of power, women empowerment is also context-specific and multiple actors, agencies, and determinants can create supportive or inauspicious environment for it.

Political empowerment is the highest level of women empowerment, which is a result of social and economic empowerment of women and, in turn, ensures continuity of their social and economic empowerment. Political empowerment is, inter alia, gauged by women representation in government in general and in national legislatures in particular. Women representation in Pakistan’s national legislature is 19.3 per cent,<sup>2</sup> which is third highest in South Asia, higher than almost two-thirds of Muslim countries, and higher than the average of the Asia (18.3%). But unfortunately this ranking does not commensurate with the rank of Pakistan in terms of women status in society or women empowerment – approaching 150th in the world. This chapter analyses why political empowerment through representation of women has not brought fruits in terms of equal rights for women and their real empowerment in society. The chapter would examine available lines of arguments to explain the incommensurability between political representation and socio-economic empowerment of women in Pakistani society.

## **Women Empowerment: Unraveling the Conundrum**

Women empowerment, as mentioned earlier, is a fluid concept, which has been defined in a variety of ways, but in general the concept is linked with gender equality and equity. Feminists believe in structured discrimination of women in society, as Kate Millett, an American feminist writer, defines politics as “power structured relationships—arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled by another.”<sup>3</sup> They are concerned with politics of everyday life, whereby women are subjugated by men against their will; and therefore, the ultimate goal of women empowerment is gender equality and equity in family, employment, and politics.

The fluid and multidimensional nature of the concept of women empowerment must be realized before measuring it in a given society and making any interventions to ensure it. In general, the concept of women empowerment is related to changes in social structures and human relations and to individual power to change to make women more and more equal to men.<sup>4</sup> Different scholars and institutions weigh these aspects differently and add different elements to define women empowerment: fundamental human rights, access to basic necessities of life,<sup>5</sup> land rights, food security, employment in formal and informal sectors,<sup>6</sup> control over sexuality and reproductive choices,<sup>7</sup> control over one’s life through mobilization and participation,<sup>8</sup> access to information, economic and social resources, and autonomy in decision-making.<sup>9</sup>

There are as many varying views regarding the sources of women empowerment as its definition: state policies and laws, social norms, and individual efforts and initiatives. The most popular view about the sources of women empowerment holds that empowerment is context-specific and social norms and traditions are the most important determinants of women empowerment. A similar view is held by the post-structuralist writers who do not understand power in explicit scene of domination or rule-giving, but embedded in a variety of domains and discourses, including those normally considered to be free of power (sexual desire or arts, for example). They equate power with knowledge and consider it dispersed everywhere in the form of norms and traditions, in the knowledge about one’s own identity and about the law of truth that dictates him to recognize himself and others in a particular way and act in a desirable manner of that knowledge.<sup>10</sup> While state policies and laws allocate authoritative values to social

norms and traditions, individual initiatives and efforts have also been emphasized as a source of women empowerment.

The Gender-related Development Index (GDI), Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) Gender Gap Index (GGI) used as measurement indices were replaced by Gender Inequality Index (GII) in 2010.<sup>11</sup> Though measuring women empowerment using these quantitative indices is useful for policymakers, these indices lack subjective and lived experiences and do not take into consideration the context-specificity of the concept of women empowerment. Furthermore, empowerment is not a point at which a woman may one day arrive, but is a lifelong process; which may be reversed at time because of some change in political or social environment. A single legislation or judicial decision may reverse the process.

### **Representation: A Mean or a Goal of Women Empowerment**

Women empowerment has political, economic, and social spheres. Empowerment in one sphere does not necessarily lead to empowerment in others, but they are definitely interlinked-creating conducive or impending context for one another. Political empowerment of women in a society portrays social and economic empowerment of women. It is because in order to achieve political empowerment in real sense, women should be empowered socially and economically, whereas politically empowered women, in turn, should strive to institutionalize social and economic empowerment of women through state intervention by laws and policies.

Women's access to the sphere of political decision making is an important measure of women empowerment. Women constitute half of the world's population, and they must have their say in political decision making, for which they must have representation in governments. No democratic system can justify its legitimacy or can successfully work with just half of its population. Like any employment, access to economic and social resources, or access to knowledge and options, access to political decision making is also a right women must have just like men; but politics is considered something 'alien' to their nature.<sup>12</sup>

In modern representative democracy, the legitimate power to govern is linked with representation. Democracy works on the principle that representatives of people decide on their behalf and

make authoritative allocation of resources and values in society. Representation is the central 'rule of the game' determining who governs. Therefore, in order to empower women, representation must be an ultimate goal.

There are different theories or models of representation: Trustee Model of representation holds that a representative is a trustee of his constituents' authority; and once elected, he would act on his own judgment and not on the whims of the constituents. Delegate Model, on the other hand, views representative as conduit conveying the opinions of his constituents. Mandate Model, developed after the emergence of modern party system, declares that people give mandate to party manifestos they outline before elections. Resemblance Model suggests that the legislature should mirror the population it is representing. In the words of John Adams, "a legislature should be an exact portrait, in miniature, of the people at large, as it should feel, reason, and act like them."<sup>13</sup> The model holds that only people belonging to a particular group, sharing the experiences of that group, can completely identify with the interests of that particular group. It is because putting oneself in the shoes of somebody else and having experienced what other people actually go through are two different things. Therefore, women in a given society should be represented by women.

Women representation is a prerequisite not only to justify legitimacy of political system or on the grounds of social justice, but is also indispensable because higher level of women's political representation will strike at the roots of gender hierarchy in public life and challenge the socio-cultural contexts impeding women empowerment by seen to be wielding power and articulating women's interests. It is because unless a group is not sufficiently visible in political arena and seem to wield political power, its ability to influence policy-making or political culture that forms the contours of representative system cannot be effective. Therefore, in order to make women related issues important in public policy calculus and to put them on political agenda, there must be sufficient number of women in legislatures and higher echelons of governmental machinery.

The idea is that a woman can understand the needs of her fellow women-women she is representing in legislature. A woman should understand the demands by other women and would strive to get them converted into decisions. Women representatives would make

laws and policies aimed at developing and strengthening institutions of women empowerment on the principle of equality of women. Women representatives can have better access to their women constituents, can better understand their demands, and can better suggest befitting remedies. Critical mass of women in law and policy making bodies can effectively assert their views to shape and prioritize women related policies of government to ensure socio-cultural and economic changes that may yield positive impact on women's access and control over social and economic resources, access to education and healthcare, and their control over their bodies, sexuality, and reproductive choices. Therefore, representation of women in political system of a country is not only a goal of women empowerment in itself but in turn also a mean to ensure and enhance women empowerment.

### **Regional Context of Women Representation and Leadership (South Asia)**

A number of studies have presented and tried to theorize about the paradox of women leadership and women empowerment in South Asia. South Asia has more powerful women politicians than any other set of countries in the world. Women in South Asian countries have held positions of presidents, prime ministers, leaders of major political parties, speaker/chair of the legislative assemblies, governors or chief ministers, and cabinet ministers. Yet, overall situation of women political participation in the region portrays a gloomy picture. The average membership of women in popular houses of parliaments is still around 8 per cent.<sup>14</sup> This phenomenon poses two important questions: (a) Despite being patriarchal societies and having paternalistic socio-cultural and political structures institutionalizing subordination of women, how have these countries produced so many politically prominent women? (b) Why there seems to be no implication of this predominance of women political leadership for women in their respective societies who normally send these women leaders to the echelons of the government. Why the overall condition of women in these societies has not been improved despite having been ruled by women? Why have they not done something to improve the plight of their gender, or why their leadership has not shown trickle-down effect?

**Table 3.1:** Women Presidents and Prime Ministers in South Asia

Sr. No.	Position	Country	Name	Tenure
1	President	India	Pratibha Devisingh Patil	2007-12
		Sri Lanka	Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga	1994-2005
2	Prime Minister	Bangladesh	Begum Khaleda Zia	1991-96 2001-06
		India	Indira Priyadarshini Gandhi	1966-77
				1980-84
		Pakistan	Benazir Bhutto	1988-90
				1993-96
		Sri Lanka	Sirimavo Bandaranaike	1960-65
			Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga	1970-77 1994-2000
				Aug.-Nov. 1994

Apart from presidents and prime ministers, South Asian countries have seen a number of other prominent women leaders holding key positions in government; for example, speaker or chair of legislative assemblies like Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury (Bangladesh) and Fahmida Mirza (Pakistan); Governors like Begum Dr. Habiba Sarobi (Bamyan, Afghanistan) Ra'ana Liaquat Ali Khan (Sindh, Pakistan), Sharada Mukherjee (Gujrat and Andhra Pradesh, India), Sheila Kaul (Himachal Pradesh, India), V.S. Ramadevi (Karnataka, India), Jothi Venkatachalam (Kerala, India), Vijayalakshmi Pandit (Maharashtra, India), Pratibha Patil (Rajasthan, India), Fatima Beevi (Tamil Nadu, India), Margaret Alva (Uttarakhand, India), Sarojini Naidu (Uttar Pradesh, India), Padmaja Naidu (West Bengal, India); Chief Ministers like Anwara Taimur (Assam, India), Rabri Devi (Bihar, India), Uma Bharati (Madhya Pradesh, India), Nandini Satpathy (Orissa, India), Rajinder Kaur Bhattal (Punjab, India), Vasundhara Raje (Rajasthan, India), Janaki Ramachandran (Tamil Nadu, India), Sucheta Kriplani (Uttar Pradesh, India), and Mamata Banerjee (West Bengal, India); and important cabinet ministers like Dipu Moni (Foreign Minister, Bangladesh), Sahara Khatun (Home Minister, Bangladesh), Mariyam Shakeela (Foreign Minister, Maldives), and Hina Rabbani Khar (Foreign Minister, Pakistan).

Despite the fact women have served in such high governmental positions, the overall representation of women in the countries of the region is not up to the mark. Following table shows women representation in South Asia:

**Table 3.2:** Percentage of Women in National Legislatures in South Asia

World Rank	Country	Lower or Single House				Upper House			
		Elections	Seats	Women	% W	Elections	Seats	Women	% W
36	Nepal	11 2013	575	172	29.9%	—	—	—	—
41	Afghanistan	9 2010	249	69	27.7%	1 2011	102	28	27.5%
73	Pakistan	5 2013	323	67	20.7%	3 2012	104	17	16.3%
77	Bangladesh	1 2014	348	69	19.8%	—	—	—	—
117	India	4 2014	543	62	11.4%	2 2014	243	29	11.9%
132	Bhutan	7 2013	47	4	8.5%	4 2013	25	2	8.0%
139	Maldives	3 2014	85	5	5.9%	—	—	—	—
140	Sri Lanka	4 2010	225	13	5.8%	—	—	—	—

Source: “Women in National Parliaments,” Inter-Parliamentary Union website, accessed September 20, 2014, <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>.

Countries like Nepal, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, where percentage of women in national legislatures is comparatively high is because of quota system, and more importantly does not translate into real empowerment of women. For example, Afghanistan, traditionally not included in South Asian region before its membership of SAARC, has second highest women representation in national legislature in South Asia—27.7 per cent in lower house, Wolesi Jirga (House of the People) in September 2010 elections, and 27.5 per cent in upper house, Mesherano Jirga (House of Elders) in January 2011 elections.<sup>15</sup> Afghanistan is important vis-à-vis Pakistan’s regional context for women representation because of cross-border ties of Pashtun community residing on both side of Durand Line. Although women representation in Afghanistan is quite high (higher than the US),<sup>16</sup> this has not translated into real power, or even fair treatment of women in Afghanistan. “Noor Zia Atmar, a former parliamentarian, ended up in a battered women’s shelter, and eventually fled the country after repeated beatings by her husband.”<sup>17</sup> The high level of representation is because of the quota law enacted in 2004 reserving at least 27 per cent of seats for women. Recently, the women reserved quota has been reduced to 20 per cent, following a trend of regressing women’s rights.<sup>18</sup> No wonder, Afghanistan along with Pakistan, and India constitute three out of five most dangerous countries for women.

India, though having witnessed highest number of women leaders on key governmental positions, still stands at 117th number in the world vis-à-vis percentage of women representation in national legislatures. A proposed bill, passed by Rajya Sabha in 2010 and



Source: Thomson Reuters Foundation.

**Fig. 3.1:** The World's Five Most Dangerous Countries for Women

awaiting clearance from Lok Sabha, stipulates 33 per cent seats for women in all legislative assemblies. It is hoped that proposed quota for women representation would help empower women in India, where gender-based violence keep claiming headlines time and again.<sup>19</sup> The good thing about women's political representation in India is that the current 11.7 per cent is without quota; but 632 women running for national legislature in recent general elections compared to 7527 men depicts lack of women empowerment owing to socio-cultural context of society. Socio-cultural context of women empowerment in India can be assessed by UNICEF's report that asserts that "50 million women are 'missing' in India as a result of female foeticide and infanticide,"<sup>20</sup> despite prenatal sex determination being banned since 1996. Women's access to education is distinctly limited compared to men. Literacy rate among men is 76 per cent, whereas that among women stands at 54 per cent, which further limits their chances of entry in politics—an example of how lack of socio-cultural empowerment of women impedes their political participation.

### Representation and Women Empowerment in Pakistan

Pakistan, as mentioned earlier, has quite satisfactory representation of women compared to its regional and religious context – 3rd highest in South Asia and higher than almost two-thirds of Muslim countries. Table 3.3 shows percentage of women representation in lower houses,

upper houses, and combined in both houses of national legislatures of the Muslim countries in descending order. The table would also help in analyzing the religious context of Pakistan.

**Table 3.3:** Percentage of Women in National Legislatures of Muslim Countries

Sr. No.	Country	Single / Lower House		Upper House		Total %
		Election	%	Election	%	
1.	Senegal	7 2012	43.3			43.3
2.	Mozambique	10 2009	39.2			39.2
3.	Uganda	2 2011	35.0			35.0
4.	Guyana	11 2011	31.3			31.3
5.	Tunisia	10 2011	28.1			28.1
6.	Afghanistan	9 2010	27.7	1 2011	27	27.6
7.	Cameroon	9 2013	31.1	4 2013	20	27.1
8.	Turkmenistan	12 2013	26.4			26.4
9.	Algeria	5 2012	31.6	12 2012	7	25.7
10.	Iraq	4 2014	25.3			25.3
11.	Sudan	4 2010	24.3	5 2010	17	23.8
12.	Kyrgyzstan	10 2010	23.3			23.3
13.	Mauritania	11 2013	25.2	11 2009	14	22.2
14.	Guinea	9 2013	21.9			21.9
15.	Albania	6 2013	20.0			20.0
16.	Saudi Arabia	1 2013	19.9			19.9
17.	Bangladesh	1 2014	19.8			19.8
18.	Kazakhstan	1 2012	25.2	8 2011	6	19.8
19.	Pakistan	5 2013	20.3	3 2012	16	19.4
20.	Uzbekistan	12 2009	22.0	1 2010	15	19.2
21.	Burkina Faso	12 2012	18.9			18.9
22.	Bahrain	10 2010	10.0	11 2010	28	18.8
23.	Togo	7 2013	17.6			17.6
24.	UAE	9 2011	17.5			17.5
25.	Indonesia	4 2014	16.8			16.8
26.	Libya	6 2014	16.0			16.0
27.	Gabon	12 2011	15.0	1 2009	17	15.8
28.	Azerbaijan	11 2010	15.6			15.6
29.	Chad	2 2011	14.9			14.9
30.	Tajikistan	2 2010	15.9	3 2010	12	14.4
31.	Turkey	6 2011	14.4			14.4
32.	Malaysia	5 2013	10.4	N.A.	29	14.2
33.	Somalia	8 2012	13.8			13.8
34.	Guinea-Bissau	4 2014	13.7			13.7
35.	Niger	1 2011	13.3			13.3
36.	Djibouti	2 2013	12.7			12.7
37.	Sierra Leone	11 2012	12.1			12.1
38.	Jordan	1 2013	12.0	10 2013	12	12.0
39.	Syria	5 2012	12.0			12.0
40.	Suriname	5 2010	11.8			11.8

(Contd.)

(Contd.)

Sr. No.	Country	Single / Lower House		Upper House		Total %
		Election	%	Election	%	
41.	Morocco	11 2011	17.0	10 2009	2	11.0
42.	Oman	10 2011	1.2	10 2011	18	9.6
43.	Mali	11 2013	9.5			9.5
44.	Gambia	3 2012	9.4			9.4
45.	Benin	4 2011	8.4			8.4
46.	Nigeria	4 2011	6.7	4 2011	6	6.6
47.	Maldives	3 2014	5.9			5.9
48.	Lebanon	6 2009	3.1			3.1
49.	Iran	5 2012	3.1			3.1
50.	Comoros	12 2009	3.0			3.0
51.	Kuwait	7 2013	1.5			1.5
52.	Yemen	4 2003	0.3	4 2001	2	0.7
53.	Qatar	7 2013	0.0			0.0

Source: Based on data from Inter-Parliamentary Union as of September 1, 2014.

Pakistan has also witnessed women leaders of national stature before and after partition. Begum Shah Nawaz, an active Muslim women leader in United India, represented Muslim women in Round Table Conferences, Geneva session of League of Nations in 1931, and ILO in 1935.<sup>21</sup> She is famous for her demand of women quota in legislative assembly of United India, efforts for recognition of women's right to inheritance of property in Muslim Personal Law of Sharia in 1948, and representing women in first constituent assembly of Pakistan along with Begum Shaista Ikramullah. Begum Ra'ana Liaqat Ali Khan, a prominent figure of freedom movement and Pakistan's first first lady, struggled for women's socio-cultural uplift throughout her political career, and founded All Pakistan Women's Association (APWA). Likewise Miss Fatima Jinnah, Begum Muhammad Ali Jauhar, Begum Salma Tassaduq Hussain, Abadi Begum, popularly known as 'Bi Amma', Lady Sughra Hidayatullah, Geti Ara Bashir Ahmed, Begum Viqarunnisa Noon, Lady Nusrat Haroon, and Begum Nawab Muhammad Ismail are some of the worth mentioning women leaders of freedom movement who continued to participate in politics after 1947.

Benazir Bhutto (Two-time prime minister of the country), Nusrat Bhutto (chairperson of Pakistan People's Party), Fahmida Mirza (Speaker National Assembly), and Hina Rabbani Khar (Foreign Minister) are the prominent women who served on key positions in Pakistan's post-independence politics. Although Pakistan was the first

Muslim country to elect a women as head of national government, the overall picture of women representation in national legislature has been gloomy since 1947. Table 3.4 shows women representation in lower house (popularly elected) of parliaments in Pakistan.

Sr No	Legislatures	Total Seats	Women Elected Directly	Women Reserved Seats	Seats Held by Women	
					Number	Percentage
1.	1st Legislature (10-08-1947 to 24-10-1954)	30	—	—	2	6.7%
2.	2nd Legislature (02-05-1955 to 07-10-1958)	80	—	—	0	0%
3.	3rd Legislature (08-06-1962 to 12-06-1965)	156	6	—	6	3.8%
4.	4th Legislature (12-06-1965 to 25-03-1969)	156	6	—	6	3.8%
5.	5th Legislature (14-04-1972 to 10-01-1977)	144	6	—	6	4.2%
6.	6th Legislature (26-03-1977 to 05-07-1977)	210	1	10	11	5.2%
7.	7th Legislature (20-03-1985 to 29-05-1988 )	217	1	21	22	10.1%
8.	8th Legislature (30-11-1988 to 06-08-1990)	217	4	20	24	11.1%
9.	9th Legislature (03-11-1990 to 17-07-1993)	217	2	—	2	0.9%
10.	10th Legislature (15-10-1993 to 05-11-1996)	217	4	—	4	1.8%
11.	11th Legislature (15-02-1997 to 12-10-1999)	217	6	—	6	2.8%
12.	12th Legislature (16-11-2002 to 15-11-2007)	342	13	61*	74	21.64%
13.	13th Legislature (17-03-2008 to 16-03-2013)	342	16	61*	77	22.51%
14.	14th Legislature (01-06-2013 to date)	342	8	61*	69	20.18%

*Source:* Pildat, Women Representation in Pakistan's Parliament.

In the first two constitutions of Pakistan, 6 seats were reserved for women in National Assembly. The current constitution of Pakistan stipulated that there would be 10 seats reserved for women for next 10 years or for next three general elections, whichever occurred later. The number was raised to 20 in 1985 by General Zia ul Haq, but then these seats lapsed after three general elections of 1977, 1985, and 1988; and therefore, there were no women reserved seats in elections

of 1990, 1993, and 1997. Then General Pervaiz Musharraf increased the number of women reserved seats to 60 in 2002.

Currently women representation in Pakistan's National Assembly and Senate combined stands at 19.3 per cent. The number of women members of National Assembly is 69 out of 340 filled seats, out of which 8 women have been elected in general elections, 60 women have been elected on women reserved seats, and one woman member has been elected on minority reserved seat. The number of women in Senate currently stands at 17 out of 104 total seats, all of which are reserved seats (4 seats are reserved for women to be elected by each provincial assembly and one from federal capital). Moreover 137 seats are reserved for women in provincial assemblies – 61 seats in Punjab Assembly, 37 in Sindh, 25 in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, and 14 seats in Balochistan Assembly. Seats reserved for women are allocated to political parties as per their general seats in National Assembly on the basis of list system.

The participation of women members of parliament is satisfactory, to say the least, in terms of parliamentary business. Following excerpt of a report by FAFEN (Free and Fair Election Network)<sup>22</sup> on women parliamentarian's performance fourth parliamentary year of 13th National Assembly of Pakistan gives an idea about the level of their participation:

“The fourth parliamentary year was marked by passage of four pro-women bills... [including] Prevention of Anti-Women Practices (Criminal Law Amendment) Act 2011... Acid Control and Acid Crime Prevention Bill 2010... National Commission on the Status of Women Bill 2012... Women in Distress and Detention Fund (Amendment) Bill 2010... Single female Members [authored] 20 out of the 53 Private Members' bills that appeared on the Orders of the Day in the fourth parliamentary year. Similarly, during the third parliamentary year, 17 out of 34 were authored by single female Members... [T]heir legislative interests encompass a variety of important national issues. They moved two bills each on criminal law, employment, elections and NADRA and one each on the Capital Development Authority (CDA), banking, child rights, food security, foreign affairs, health, housing and works, citizenship, and right to information. [They] contributed exceptionally to oversight of executive

by putting up questions. Out of 2,365 questions raised during the fourth parliamentary year, more than half (1,196 or 51%) were put forward by female Members. On average, 16 questions were submitted by each female MNA, almost four times more than their male counterparts who raised 1,169 questions... [W]omen legislators were part of 75 of the total 97 Calling Attention Notices either individually or jointly with their male and female colleagues... Out of 1764 Points of Order raised in the House, the women parliamentarians' share was 252 or 14 per cent... The female representatives moved 42 Resolutions."<sup>23</sup>

### **Situational Analysis**

The abovementioned facts and figures are impressive, and portray quite optimistic picture of women participation in parliamentary role in Pakistan. In fact women role in parliamentary business makes us believe that women are far more active and empowered than their male counterparts in legislature. But one cannot keep his eyes from looking back to the ground realities. Pakistan has been ranked 145th in Gender-related Development Index (GDI), 127th in Gender Inequality Index of 187 countries of the world. Pakistan has been ranked among top five most countries of the world by Thomson Reuters Foundation survey from 213 experts from all over the world on the basis of sexual and non-sexual violence, health threats, tradition and/or religion, harmful practices rooted in culture, lack of access to economic resources and overall perception of danger.<sup>24</sup>

Socio-cultural practices in Pakistan pose serious threats to women empowerment in Pakistan. Forced or early age marriages, so-called honour killings (Karo Kari), dowry killings, *Purdah*, *Watta Satta*, *Swara* and *Wani*, and 'Marriage to Quran,' perpetuate subjugation of women in Pakistani society. Their right and liberties are constrained in the name of protection, modesty, and prevention of immoral activities. Women's access to education, healthcare, and gainful employment is limited because of socio-cultural and economic constraints.

Socio-cultural and economic indicators of political empowerment draw a deplorable image of Pakistani society. The most important parameter of women empowerment is ownership of land, which is systematically denied to women in Pakistan in general. In spite of

the fact that Islam and the state laws allow women to inherit and have property, women in Pakistan normally do not own land; most of the cultural practices like marriages to Quran, or to the boys of very young age, or to the brothers of deceased husband are aimed at depriving women of their inherited land. Even in cases where women do have property, they seldom exercise decision making power vis-à-vis use, rent, or sale of that property, which is done by male members of the family. Access to other economic resources and employment is also very limited. They normally do not have access to formal sectors of employment; even when they do, they do not get equal pays to that of men. Women constitute major chunk of informal sector employment, where they are more vulnerable to exploitation. Where they are self-employed, there are very limited credit and extension services available to them, and because of limited access to markets, they have to rely on middlemen and sell their products cheaply.

The access to education is very limited for women in Pakistan. Parents normally do not send their girls to school in rural areas, and even when they do, they dropout early on account of financial limitations, early marriages, traditional beliefs. The condition of health sector in Pakistan is not up to the mark in general, but for women it is miserable to say the least. Women do not normally exercise reproductive choices either in terms of number or spacing of children, due to which they often face serious health issues. Frequent pregnancies in pursuit of male offspring lead, domestic violence, malnourishments, and treatment by pseudo doctors, quacks and *peers* often cause physical and psychological disorders.

This incommensurability between political representation of women in Pakistan and socio-cultural and economic indicators of women empowerment puts a question mark to the quota system of women representation adopted in Pakistan, or elsewhere in the world. The principle of reserved women seats is in place in around 40 countries on the premise that equal or proportional representation of women – no matter how it is accomplished—is the first step towards women empowerment and establishment of a more balanced system of governance. It is, no doubt, a very plausible argument, especially considering the performance of women in Pakistan's parliament. But the why this performance of women on reserved seats has not transformed into socio-economic empowerment of women at the grassroots level? Why women political leaders at the highest level of the government machinery and women in parliament on reserved seats

don't seem to have any implication for the women whom they supposedly represent.

There can be two lines of arguments in response to this question: the first challenges the representation criteria or process through which these women elites come to power, whereas the other argument challenges the whole idea of bringing change through legislation and state policies. Let's apply both of them to analyze the relation between political empowerment through representation and socio-economic empowerment of women.

The first explanation for incommensurability between representation and women empowerment at grassroots level challenges the criteria and the processes for the election of these women representatives on reserved seats. As mentioned earlier, the reserved seats are allocated to political parties as per their general seats in National Assembly on the basis of list system. But who gets to represent on reserved seats? The answer is kith and kin of top political leaders get to be elected on these reserved seats. The major chunk of the women on these reserved seats comprises of daughters, wives, sisters, sisters-in-law, and close relatives of the top leadership of different political parties. In 14th National Assembly of Pakistan elected in May 2013 general elections, the relatives of male political leaders have "have once again grabbed a lion's share of the reserved seats for women in both the National Assembly and provincial assemblies."<sup>25</sup> These reserved seats are also used by the political parties to get those women of their party elected who have otherwise lost in the general elections. "Some of the lucky women, who lost on May 11, are now members of the assemblies via the reserved seats route."<sup>26</sup>

What adds to the problem of women representation is the fact that the women who have been elected in general elections are also relatives of the top political leadership and belong to influential political families. Furthermore, most of them have been elected on the seats of their relatives after death, removal, or disqualification of male members of their family. Let's take the example of current national assembly. Total 8 women have been elected in general elections and all of them belong to influential political families with a history of male members of their family being former or current office holders.

Shazia Mubashir, elected from NA-129 (Lahore) on PML(N) ticket, got elected against the seat left vacated by Chief Minister Mian Shehbaz Sharif, who kept his seat of provincial assembly. Ms. Shazia

Mubashir contested the election after his husband Rana Mubashir was disqualified by Lahore High Court on account of fake degree. Ghulam Bibi Bharwana, elected from NA-88 (Jhang-Cum-Chiniot) on PML(N) ticket, is the granddaughter of Mehr Ghulam Haider Bharwana, who became member of parliament several times from the same area. Saira Afzal Tarar, elected from NA-102 (Hafizabad) on PML(N) ticket, is daughter in law of Rafiq Tarar former President of Pakistan.

Faryal Talpur and Dr. Azra Fazal Pechuho, both elected on PPP ticket from NA-207 (Larkana) and NA-213 (Nawabshah) respectively, are sisters of former President of Pakistan, Asif Ali Zardari. Dr. Fehmida Mirza, elected from NA-225 (Badin) on PPP ticket, is daughter of Qazi Abdul Majeed Abid, who has served as minister in federal and provincial (Sindh) cabinets in 1980s. Her husband, Dr. Zulfiqar Mirza, remained Home Minister Sindh and a close friend of Former President Asif Ali Zardari. Her brother, Qazi Asad Abid has also remained member of National Assembly; her son, Hasnain Mirza, is member Sindh Provincial Assembly. Shazia Mari, elected from NA-235 (Sanghar) on PPP ticket, is daughter of Atta Muhammad Marri, who was member of National Assembly and also served as Deputy Speaker Sindh Provincial Assembly. Shamas-un-Nisa, elected from NA-237 (Thatta) on PPP ticket, is wife of Abdul Hameed Memon, a parliamentarian, and daughter-in-law of Sadiq Memon, founding members of PPP. She got party ticket after her son, Jalil Memon, the then Sindh minister, died in a road accident, and her younger son, Sadiq Ali Memon, who won the same seat, got disqualified by the court.

So all of them belong to influential political families with a history of male members being elected traditionally from the constituencies they have been elected in recent elections. What is wrong with belonging to influential political families? First and the foremost is that most of them do not contest elections as long as male members of family 'eligible' to contest are available, which means they are not contesting elections as 'women' candidates but as substitute of their 'ineligible' male family members. Otherwise most of them belong to the families that are traditionally conservative feudal in nature, and do not allow women to go out of their homes, let alone contest elections. For example, when abovementioned Ghulam Bibi Bharwana the then a PML(Q)<sup>27</sup> candidate in NA-87, along with another Bharwana woman, Saima Akhtar, an independent candidate in NA-90, decided to contest in 2002

general elections, a leading newspaper of the country, *Dawn*, published the news under heading, “Bharwana women set to create history.”<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, they are elected because of the influence of their families, whose male members are the source of their strength in their respective constituencies but are not eligible to contest elections or have influence in more than one constituency therefore need another candidate. So how can they act independently? How do they represent women of Pakistan?

Therefore, the first line of argument, the one challenging the modus operandi of the election on reserved seats that ends up sending female relatives of top leadership to parliament, does not hold water; because women who do not come on reserved seats do not also represent the common women of Pakistan. Let’s analyze the second line of argument that challenges the whole idea of bringing change through legislation and state policies.

Second explanation of the lack of women empowerment despite women representation in legislative assemblies and cabinets is close to Foucauldian discourse, which equates power with knowledge, norms, and values and with laws and force. It understands power to flow along discourses and move through populations and does not accept power as a property of individuals or institutions. In the words of Wendy Brown, “If power operates through norms, and not only through law and force, and if norms are borne by words, images, and the built environment, then popular discourses, market interpellations, and spatial organization are as much a vehicle for power as are troops, bosses, prime ministers, or police.”<sup>29</sup> Applying this explanation of power to the problem of incommensurability between women representation and women’s socio-economic empowerment leads us to conclude that no matter how many women are present in national legislatures and no matter how much legislation is done to empower women, women would not be empowered practically unless the society is not structurally transformed.

Laws and state policies cannot change the fate of women in any society unless the norms and values do not equate them with their male counterparts and favour their real empowerment. There’s a popular saying in Pakistan that before we make laws, we decide how to break it without being punished. State policies and laws declaring women equal to men would not have any practical value unless there’s acceptance of the fact in general masses. What is the point in making offences against women more and more severely punishable, if they

are not reported because the norms and values of Pakistani society dictates to keep matters related to female members of family undisclosed in the name of 'family honour'? What benefit would it yield to fix minimum wages for women workers, when they are not employed in formal sectors of economy and informal sectors are not regulated by law? What purpose would it serve to reserve seats for women in legislative assemblies, if only women from influential political families can get elected on those seats and common women of society cannot afford to contest in general elections and do not have influence to get elected on reserved seats?

This phenomenon can be substantiated by the difference of male and female literacy rate in rural and urban areas of the four provinces. In rural areas, the difference between male and female literacy rates is more than that in urban areas. The difference between urban and rural area literacy rates can be attributed to availability of schools, infrastructure, and economic status of parents, but the difference between male and female literacy rates is, inter alia, linked with willingness of parents to send their girls to schools.

As mentioned earlier, women representation in South Asia and Muslim countries, providing regional and religious context for Pakistan respectively, exhibit the same pattern where increase in the number of women representatives has not transformed in socio-economic empowerment of women. Afghanistan for example has highest women representation in women and still is the most dangerous country to be a woman, Saudi Arabia has more women representation than that of the US and women are not allowed to drive vehicles there.

Another interesting fact is that while members of 13th national assemble asked almost four times more questions than their male counterparts during 4th parliamentary year, women representations from traditionally conservative parties – ANP, PMLF, and MMAP – did not ask any question on the floor of the House. So women would be empowered with increasing their number in legislative assemblies but by changing the laws of truth (embedded in norms, values, and knowledge) about their status and capabilities.

## **Conclusion**

Political empowerment must not be understood in terms of quantitative measurement of women representation in legislative assemblies, but

in terms of quality socio-political participation of women in political system of the country through indigenous acceptance of society rooted and expressed through norms and values. Musai, Alehashem, and Abhari present a model of socio-political participation of women, which outlines a hierarchy of women political participation.

**Table 3.5:** Hierarchy of women political participation

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Having formal political position (governmental)
Active membership in organization or political party
Participation in public societies, demonstrations etc
Passive membership in organization or political party
Participation in informal political discussions
Voting
Non-involvement in politics

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*Source:* Maysam Musai, Berad Razavi Alehashem, and Seyede Marzieh Fatemi Abhari, "Participation of Women in Sociopolitical Development in Iran," *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences* 4, no. 3 (March 2014): 574-75.

An indigenous movement for political empowerment of women would be the one achieved as a result of these steps of political participation. In Pakistan, women have right to vote and they do vote as well, but that is the lowest level of political participation as voting is not necessarily based on rational choice. Rather in most of the cases women vote because the male members of the family or even of locality take them to polling stations and ask them to vote for someone. Even if they cast vote on their own will, they are supposedly not familiar with the political system and its realities, because of the level of their awareness and access to education, and therefore, not able to make a learned choice. The next level is participation in informal political discussions, which is generally not observed in Pakistan. It is because the norms and values impose the 'law of truth' that politics and activities and discussions related to it belong to the 'public sphere' and women by nature belong to the 'private sphere'. The social norm set in this regard is that politics is alien to women nature and is not their 'sphere'.

The higher levels of political participation of women are actually alien to common women of Pakistani society. The higher levels are 'assumed' to belong to upper class – either activists from ultramodern cadre of society or women from influential political families. Social norms—set to impose the laws of truth—make these activities

undesirable for women, who are supposed to do household activities, give birth and take care of their children, and remain within the four walls of their homes. Likewise membership of political parties is not common in Pakistan. Political parties in Pakistan do have women workers, but they normally belong to political families. The women, who do not hail from political families and still take part in political parties or activities like demonstrations, are considered indecorous and shameless as the social norms expect women to observe modesty and protect the honour of their families.

Reserved seats for women in legislative assemblies of Pakistan provided an opportunity for highest level of women's political participation. The absence of intermediary stages between voting and having formal political position creates a gap between electors and their representatives. The women in Pakistan have right to vote (lowest level) and they have representation in parliament (highest level), but intermediary levels of political participation of women are missing in Pakistan. Women do not take part in political discussions, women membership of political parties is very rare, and they do not take part in political demonstrations. So the women representatives on reserved seats do not follow the stepwise route of political participation to the highest level, and therefore, remain alien to the system. Electors, on the other hand, do not make learned choices as the system is alien to them.

A recent phenomenon of political mobilization triggered by Imran Khan and his political party Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) is an example of this gap. Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, founded in 1996 by former cricketer and philanthropist, Imran Khan, is centrist political party and claims to be the only non-family party in Pakistan. The anti-status quo movement of PTI got momentum and popular support on the eve of 2013 general elections, in which the party got 2nd highest popular votes and third highest seats in National Assembly of Pakistan. The unique feature of PTI movement was the support of a very large number of urban women families. PTI attracted the middle class families, which are highly educated but hitherto were indifferent to political activities in Pakistan-the common women of Pakistan, not typical segment that has an acceptance in society as 'political'.

So when they started coming out to express their political views, started taking part in discussions, and started to join rallies and demonstrations, they were and are still being labeled as vulgar, immodest, indiscreet, unscrupulous, and pseudo 'ultra-modern' (as

if ultra-modern are allowed to participate in political parties, but they are pseudo ultra-modern and therefore are not acceptable). Recently, PTI has launched a massive campaign against alleged rigging in 2013 general elections, which ended up in a sit-in in Islamabad near parliament house and is still on after 50 days. The supporters of PML(N), the party in power, responding to this phenomenon in discussions and social media declare these gatherings as concerts and accuse women of immoral activities with the men in those gatherings. It is because norms and values of the society do not expect women to participate in such gatherings and demonstrations as they are the domain of men only. Social norms in Pakistan do not question the voting right of women nor do they object political representation of women in parliament, but the intermediary stages of political participation of women do not have the social legitimacy or sanction of social norms and the law of truth imposed by those norms.

Where does this social legitimacy come from? Social norms, values, and traditions, borne by the language, symbols, and words. Who decides these norms? The answer is Knowledge. Our knowledge about the social realities makes our norms, and dictates us to behave accordingly. People accept or reject social realities on the criterion of norms and values dictated by law of truth which is imposed by the knowledge they have about those realities. So real empowerment of women would not come from higher representation of women in legislative assemblies or from women empowerment laws imposed through legislation but from laws imposed by the knowledge. Knowledge that women are equal to men and should have equal rights, equal access to social and economic resources, and have equal capabilities to participate in politics. This knowledge would impose the law or truth embedded in social values empowering women in Pakistani society. This knowledge is not necessarily related to literacy or formal education, but about awareness in society about the equality of women to men.

Political empowerment is indeed highest level of women empowerment which results from socio-economic empowerment of women, but it does not work the other way around. Political empowerment of women can, however, ensure continuity of socio-economic empowerment of women in society, provided former is a result of latter. If political empowerment comes through socio-economic empowerment, it would definitely strengthen and perpetuate socio-economic empowerment of women.

## Notes

1. Wendy Brown, "Power after Foucault," in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Theory*, eds. John S. Dryzek, Bonnie Honig, and Anne Phillips (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 65.
2. National Assembly of Pakistan currently have 69 women out of 340 sitting members (60 women reserved seats, one woman on minority reserved seat, and 8 elected in general elections), and Senate has 17 women senators out of total house of 104.
3. Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 23.
4. CARE, "Women's Empowerment," quoted in Gender Equity Program (GEP), *Women's Empowerment in Pakistan: A Scoping Study* (Islamabad: Aurat Publication and Information Services Foundation, 2011), 2.
5. Augusto Lopez-Claros and Saadia Zahidi, *Women's Empowerment: Measuring the Global Gender Gap* (Switzerland: World Economic Forum, 2005).
6. Gender Equity Program (GEP), *Women's Empowerment*, 7-28.
7. Bushra Zulfiqar, *Women and Economy: The Politics of Empowerment* (Saarbrücken, Germany: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2010), quoted in *ibid.*, 4.
8. Azra Asghar Ali, "Empowerment and Political Mobilization of Women in Pakistan," *Pakistan Vision* 13, No. 2 (2012): 96-108.
9. Naila Kabeer, "Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: A Critical Analysis of the Third Millennium Development Goal," *Gender and Development* 13, No. 1 (2005): 13-24.
10. For detailed analysis, see Brown, "Power after Foucault," 65-84.
11. Gender Equity Program (GEP), *Women's Empowerment*, 4.
12. Ali, "Women in Pakistan," 96.
13. John Adams, Letter to John Penn (1776), quoted in Robert E. Goodin, *Innovating Democracy: Democratic Theory and Practice after the Deliberative Turn* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 233.
14. Pildat, *Women Representation in Pakistan's Parliament*, Background Paper (Islamabad: Pildat Publications, 2004).
15. "Women in National Parliaments," Inter-Parliamentary Union website, accessed September 20, 2014, <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>.
16. *Priceconomics Blog*; "Afghanistan Has More Women in National Parliament Seats than the U.S.," blog entry by Zachary Crockett, January 30, 2014.
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*
19. Neeta Lal, "Women's Political Representation Lagging in India," Inter Press Service, New Delhi, June 29, 2014, accessed September 20, 2014, <http://www.ipsnews.net/2014/06/womens-political-representation-lagging-in-india/>.

20. UNICEF, cited in *ibid*. Neeta Lal further alleges, “Those girl children who survive this mindset tend to be given poorer care than boys. The patriarchal attitude is so deeply entrenched across the country that, according to the 2011 census, India now has 37 million fewer women than men (586.5 million women to 623.7 million men).”
21. Ali, “Women in Pakistan”, 98-99.
22. FAFEN is a coalition of forty two leading organizations of civil society, aimed at strengthening all forms of democratic accountabilities, primarily by scrutinizing elections and parliamentary proceedings in Pakistan.
23. FAFEN, Women Legislators Assert Lawmaking, Oversight Roles.
24. “The world’s five most dangerous countries for women: A Thomson Reuters Foundation global poll of experts,” *Thomson Reuters*, June 15, 2011, accessed August 12, 2014, <http://www.trust.org/documents/2011-women-poll-results.pdf>.
25. Zahid Gishkori, “Women’s Reserved Seats: Top Politicians’ Spouses, Kin Strike It Lucky,” *The Express Tribune*, May 30, 2013.
26. *Ibid*.
27. Pakistan Muslim League (Quaid-e-Azam), a king’s party assembled by General Pervaiz Musharraf by gathering ‘electables’ from all over Pakistan formerly associated with PML(N), PPP, and other parties.
28. Dawn (Lahore), October 10, 2002. The newspaper outlined a detailed history of Bharwanas and went on to describe the family traditions: “Bharwanas are traditionally very strict about their women. They are kept under strict purdah within the four walls of their havelis. They have to wear old-fashioned shuttlecock burqa when they are allowed to go out on very rare occasions. They are seldom sent to school and literacy rate among Bharwana women is negligible.”
29. Brown, “Power after Foucault,” 66.