WOMEN EMPOWERMENT BY LOCAL REPRESENTATION: A CASE STUDY OF LAHORE

Dr. Khalid Manzoor Butt [*]
Tabita Victor

Abstract: *Local representation means the involvement of the elected local community in policy making, and decision making about their representative areas. Pakistan is a country where women, though they are almost half of the population, have rare opportunities to be part of the political activities. They remain under the male domination, and confront various social cultural and economic disparities. This situation more or less is the same in all South Asian regions. A limited number of women take part in political affairs, and mostly they belong to families having political influence and background. Generally, they take part in politics on behest of their male family members to enhance their power and are labeled as 'mask representatives'. This study will see the space of women at local bodies' level, and their role in local representation. In order to empower women, local representation is considered one of the useful mechanisms. In this research, elements of participation and representation suggested by Celis (2008) and bottom up approach is used which stresses on participatory democracy and involvement of the locals in decision making about the area. In a country like Pakistan women representation is there, but they are not empowered in real terms. Women at grassroots level are generally suppressed and deprived, and they seem least concerned about their rights and role in political affairs. For the real empowerment of women, local representation should be strengthened by meaningful participation and ratio of women. This platform can be used as a nursery to train them at national level politics and to have their due rights.*

Keywords: Women representation, empowerment, political participation, local bodies, separate electorates, mask representation

In many areas of the world, it is observed that women remained deprived and powerless in most spheres of life. Indeed, they can contribute in social and economic fields by their meaning full involvement. One cannot deny that political participation of all segments is important for economic growth and development. A report states, "Empowerment implies the creation of an enabling environment for individuals to fully use their capabilities and to take charge of their lives. Empowerment also implies the building or acquiring of capacity to accomplish certain tasks and attain specific goals."[1] Since inception of the UN, women empowerment has gained a huge coverage. At international level, some steps were taken to strengthen women like the 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights' (UDHR) which clearly states in its Article 2, "Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status". One can also see in the Beijing Platform, "be judged on the non-quantifiable aspect of women's empowerment (e.g.) increased ability of women to enter into political leadership or to create radical or revolutionary reversals in the flow of political power as well as the number of women in position of power and decision-making."[2] The main objective of this platform was to provide access for full participation of women in the state decision making. The countries joined it are supposed to provide the opportunities to women in political parties, electoral institutes and provide convenience to them. In this regard, state should be responsible to safe guard the rights and freedom of the women groups. Pakistan is also the signatory of 'Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women' (CEDAW) which gives recognition to females.

Similarly the Constitution of Pakistan 1973, Article 25 clearly carries, "All citizens are equal before the law and are entitled to equal protection before the law: there shall be no discrimination on the basis of sex alone." But one could have a better understanding if one gauges the indicators of empowerment and that how and how much women participate in the decision making process. In Pakistan problems like governance, illiteracy, poverty, instability and disparities persist. All of these problems generate trust deficit among the people and marginalized segments remained deprived. People generally do not encourage women to participate in politics; so they remain neglected, face socio-cultural and religious barriers and discriminatory laws. Women are one of the marginalized segments and their condition can be improved through political empowerment only. Political empowerment means due role of the women in the policy and decision making of a country. Women in developed world are economically and socially in better positions as compared to women of developing countries, thus; they remained vulnerable due to their low level of participation in politics. The ratio of women's political participation in developing countries does not correspond with their number. Indeed, it is imperative for their empowerment that they should have the right of vote of their own choice, undertake campaign for their view point, and contest the elections. So they can also become an agent of change through participation. Their involvement in political affairs will lead and ensure the protection of their rights, growth and their due representation. They need to be empowered to minimize their dependency and exploitation.. Therefore, the best strategy would be that women empowerment should be started at the grassroots level.

Local representation means to involve the people in small scale decision making of the area. Local government is the basic and initial forum for the political training, and it provides close interaction with people of the area. "For both men and

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[*] In Charge, Department of Political Science, GC University, Lahore (Email: khalidmanzoor63@hotmail.com).

women, local government experience is regarded as a very useful preparation for a national political career."[3] Indeed local government bodies give political education, awareness, and political participation. This awareness in turn helps women in putting pressure on the leadership to give them their due space. Therefore, this study will see space of women at local government level and their position in local representation. To be more specific about the area of study, Lahore has been selected as a case study.

Objectives of the Study

- ✓ To figure out space for women in local bodies.
- ✓ To see the effectiveness of local government toward women's problems.
- ✓ To suggest the role of women at local representation.

Hypothesis

Women's meaningful and appropriate representation at local bodies leads towards their empowerment.

Statement of the Problem

In Pakistan, women are socially, culturally, religiously and economically under the influence of their male family members. Although women are almost half of the population, yet their representation in politics is ineffective. In Pakistan, women politicians, either at national or at local level, are mostly under the influence of male politicians. Generally, a female politician is a daughter, wife, mother, sister or relative of a political activist or leader. One can say that woman representation is there, but practically they do not have any say. Indeed, 'say' and independent decision making of the women are missing at local level. For the real empowerment, they have to be independent in the decision making so that true representation may be acquired for them. The women involved in local bodies' politics are generally being used by their male family members to gain more power and enhance their political influence.

Indeed, local representation can be used as a nursery to nourish women's political abilities and prepare them to take part in politics at provincial and national level. By and large in our society when a woman does something which is not in general practice, man does not allow her on the pretext of social values. We can take an example of smaller cities and towns where if a female drives a car, people stair her in an awkward manner. But in big cities like Lahore or Karachi where people are familiar they don't take female driving as an unusual activity. In Pakistan women need encouragement, independence, exposure and need of the hour is to make a participatory social culture where they should be given appropriate opportunities and meaning full participation in local representations to start with.

Conceptual framework

Empowerment: Women in Pakistan have been confronting social, cultural, economic dependency, which limits their political participation. For the betterment of women and society, they should be empowered. Explaining empowerment, Anjum describes, "A process of reconstructing group identity, raising consciousness, acquiring new skill and up grading knowledge base. It progressively imparts to the poor a new power over the economic and social forces that fashion their daily lives"[4] Empowerment is the way to pulling up the marginalized communities from the vulnerabilities. Another connotation is, "The term empowerment has different meanings in different social and political contexts, and does not translate easily into all languages. … Local terms associated with empowerment include: self-strength, control, self-power, self-reliance, own choice, life of dignity in accordance with one's values, capability of fighting for one's rights, independence, own decision making, being free, awakening, and capability."[5] So one can say that local empowerment is "a process where people assert control over the factors which affect their lives."[6] Pakistan has been functioning under strong central government. After 18th amendment, provinces have got autonomy. Decentralization means to give power to federating units and further to administrative units for uniform development and facilitation of people at local level. This mechanism is more close to the people and representatives to listen and understand the feelings and problems of the people. Charlton, Jackie et al. identify the indicators of political decentralization. It is stated local elections must be free and fair in the presence of independent judiciary to promote political decentralized system.

Table No: 1   Political Decentralization Indicators

Indicators	Sector	Macro (Local)
Political decentralization	Importance of elected bodies in sector policy formation	Multi-party local government election
	Importance of elected bodies in sector policy formulation	Elected local governments
	Importance of elected bodies in sector service delivery	Secret ballot in local elections
	Importance of elected bodies in decisions about levels of sector funding	Impartiality of the Judiciary
		Elections held at regular intervals
		Elections free and fair

Source: Charlton, Jackie et al., 2002

As explained above in the Table the decentralization is useful when free and fair elections are held in a smooth manner at the local level with regular intervals.

Political Representation: Representation is the mean by which large number of people can express their demands. People select their representatives and get themselves involve in the political affairs. They can directly or indirectly became part of the decision making. Representation becomes the main objective of the recognition as stated by Iwanaga, "if empowerment is defined as the capacity to choose, women's political representation is no doubt potentially an empowering process."[7] Their representation will give them recognition and through representation they can express their demands. Chowdhury presents five reasons about that, "why increasing women's representation and participation is necessary: (i) It is a question of democracy and equality as well as a question of civil rights making the demand for proportional representation of women in politics unavoidable, (ii) Women's insignificant presence in politics raises questions about the legitimacy of the democratic process and of decision-making authorities, (iii) Women are well informed and experienced about their basic problems and needs. But they will be deprived of equal shares if they are not properly represented in politics, (iv) Women's increased participation in politics and decision-making bodies will facilitate more changes and open up more spaces for them, (v) Finally, for the efficient and maximum utilization of human resources, women should be increasingly allowed in politics."[8] For the political representation Celis (2008) described, "the phenomenon of political representation and further divided the phenomenon of women representation in to three dimensions: first full and equal participations, secondly descriptive type representation where men reflecting the society composition."[9] Third is substantive representation which ensures women representation, their interest and issues in policy procedure. In the context of Pakistan descriptive kind of women representation will be seen or observed. To strengthening the women it should begin at the grass root level. This is the way which leads them from smaller scale to a large unit in an appropriate direction. According to bottom up approach, which states that local actors can participate in decision-making of a local strategy and moreover in the selection of the priorities for their own local area. To make them recognized things need to be sought out at smaller level. In the context of this approach women participation in decision making can be improved at local level. For this study Celis concept of representation and bottom up approach is used to see the level of women participation, space and system of participatory government in Pakistan.

Methodology

It is an explorative and descriptive study to explain the scenario of women's powerless. It would be qualitative research based on different views and opinions derived from primary research methods like interview and observation. Purposive sampling method will be preferred and sample group consisting of the female voter's, women councilors, women politicians, and women rights activists, experts, journalist and media personals. Interviews are semi structured and information placed in categories and subcategories to gather the common factors to test the hypothesis.

Conditions of Women in South Asia

Status of women in the South Asian region is still very low. "They share certain predominant features: centralized government, social-economic inequalities based on class, gender and cast and nationalistic divisive claims on ground of ethnicity, language and religion….South Asian women have born the greatest burden of poverty, deprivation, illiteracy and morbidity. They have also been the major victims of violence."[10] Due to similarities in cultural and social aspects, conditions of women are more or less same in the region and are still deprived of their basic rights. A small number of women are involved in constructive activities even those are discriminated and exploited by the male members of the society. This region has also produced some leading female figures, however all of them led by males and belonged to political families; Srimavon Bandaranayake (Srilanka), Indira Gandi, Sonia Gandi, Rabri Devi (India) Khalida Zia and Sheikh Hasina Wajid (Bangladesh), Fatima Jinnah, Nusrat Bhutto, Nasim Walli Khan and Benazir Bhutto (Pakistan) are very well known personalities. It is seen, "The majority of women elected via reserved seats of South Asian Parliaments share some common characteristics: they belong to the elite, middle and upper middle classes, come from educated families, and already from the first legislatorial period, tend to become mere figureheads with no real bargaining power."[11]

In South Asia, women are mostly pressurized by the male domination. The women representation remained reserved as one of the leading causes is the male dominating culture in this region. "Mahbub ul haq stated (…) decision making has

traditionally been regarded as a male dominant in South Asia. Often using custom and traditions as a tool, women have been sidelined from most decision-making process…. This lack of liberty is a tradition that is rooted in the home and the community where male members maintain strict control over decision making and follows through the highest levels of national legislature and parliaments." [12]

Table No 2:   Representation of Women in Parliament (2004)

Country	Total Seats in Lower Chamber	Seats held by Women	% of Seats held by Women
Pakistan	342	74	21.64
India	543	48	8.84
Bangladesh	300	6	2.0
Sri Lanka	225	10	4.44
Nepal	205	12	5.85
Bhutan	150	14	9.33
Maldives	150	3	6.0
S.A Total	1982	167	8.43

Source: PILDAT, *Women Representation in Parliament's Pakistan* (Background Paper) PILDAT, Lahore, 2004, 12.

It is pertinent to mention here that in Pakistan 15% seats are reserved for females that why there is high percentage. However in other countries of South Asia there is nominal representation of women in the parliaments.

Women Local Representation in Pakistan

The effective way to show democratic attributes are the representation and participation of the community in decision making. In Pakistan different administrative sectors of governments work in a hierarchal manner starting from top of them as is national, provincial and local level. However the local government is the lowest administrative tier of the government, which works specifically at the grass root level. It is further divided among three levels district, tehsil and union level. Notwithstanding the local government system has not remained functional throughout the history. Long gaps, dis-functioning in the structures and amendments have made it weak. Women representation in the political system always remained very low "the initial steps for the institutionalization of female participation in the political sphere were taken by the colonial state in opposition to the native sentiments and instincts. As a result of the efforts of the Indian Women Association, the Montague Chelmsford reforms of 1919 granted limited franchise to women. The colonial state also lifted the prohibition on women candidates in 1924 and the government of Indian Act 1935 reserved seats for women for the first time in the council of states the Indian legislative assembly and the provincial legislators. The franchise committee of the Round Table conference, nonetheless, noted the severe hostility of the Muslim men from the North to the reforms. Following independence, the pro to western elite that success the colonial state preserved with the formula of reservation of seats for women in the 1956, 1962 and 1973 constitutions, irrespective of the initial reservations of the religious elite. … all indirectly elected by the members of the respective assemblies." [13] Musharaf regime provided 33 % of representation of female at all administrative levels; a part from that Legal Framework order 2002 raised the position of women in political participation.

Pakistan is a federal state and divided in upper and lower house, "…The National Assembly has 342 seats, of which 60 are reserved for women." [14] Besides, "apart from 60 reserved seats, there are 16 directly elected women in the national assembly. They hold 22.2 percent seats in the National assembly, 17 percent seats in the senate and 17.6 percent seats in the provisional assemblies." [15]

Table No 3:   Women Representation in Local Government in Pakistan.

Time Period	Regime	Representation
1958-1968	Ayub Khan	No special representation under Basic Democracies
1971-1977	Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto	No special representation was provided
1977-1985	Zia-ul-Haq	2 seats at UC and 10 percent for other tiers except NWFP
1988-1990	Benazir Bhutto	Local government elections were not held
1990-1993	Nawaz Sharif	10.4 percent
1994-1996	Benazir Bhutto	Local government elections were not held
1997-1999	Nawaz Sharif	12.7% in Punjab, 25.8 % in Balochistan, 2.9 % in NWFP and 23% in Sindh
1999-2008	Pervez Musharraf	33% at all levels
2008 to date	Yousaf Raza Gillani	Status quo maintained

Source: Adapted from Aurat Publication and Information Service Foundation, 2001. [16]

Pakistan is the country has been facing governance issue. Since independence governments were not strong and capable enough to manage their affairs. Pakistan saw constitutional struggle, militarily coups and a short period of democratic form of government.

Table No 4:   Legislative position regarding Women's Representation

Provinces	Seats reserved for women in the senate(upper house) total strength (100)	Seats reserved for women in the national assembly (lower House) total strength (342)	Provincial Assemblies	
			Total strength	Seats reserved for women
Punjab	4	35	371	66
Sindh	4	14	168	29
Balochistan	4	3	65	11
NWFP	4	8	124	22
FATA	0	0	NA	0
Federal	1	0	NA	0
Total	17	60	728	128

Source: Legal Framework Order, 2002.

Table No 5:   Gender-disaggregated voter turnout (2005)

Turnout (percentage)			
Region	Male	Female	Total
Punjab	61.48	43.96	53.45
Sindh	47.60	24.31	37.58
NWFP	57.42	21.07	41.22
Balochistan	39.27	21.45	31.06
Overall	56.83	35.86	47.38

Source: Election commission of Pakistan, quote in Farrah Pervaiz Saleh, "Locating Women's Engagement in Democratization, Representation and Government Structure of Pakistan", in Bennett, 2007.

"According to this data, female turnout averaged 35.9 per cent, as against male turnout of 56.8 per cent. The data also shows a significant difference between female voter's turnout in Punjab and in the other provinces. While cultural norms which dictate the seclusion of women may have been factors in low female voter turnout in NWFP and Balochistan, the low turnout in Sindh was against expectations, given the relatively high female political awareness in the province."[17] Women are selected as *Nazims* and Naib *Nazims* in local bodies at union, tehsil and district level. "In the first Local Government elections in 2000, 16 women were elected as *Nazims* or *Naib Nazims*. The table below shows the distribution of the 32 women elected to these positions in the 2005 Local Government election."[18] It is seen that "in 2008 General Election, women in the South Waziristan Agency (in FATA) voted for the first time."[19] There were some areas where all the contesting candidates agreed to not allow women to cast their votes in the election of 2013 which reflects the severe male domination even in the 21st century in Pakistan.

Findings

Women in Pakistan are one of the most marginalized segments of society. This marginalized group always remained neglected and exploited throughout the history. Although women are in slightly majority in number but in reality, they always are at the receiving end. In Pakistan, Khyber Pukhtun Khawa and Balochistan are more backward in their attitudes and approach toward women. Comparatively Punjab and Sindh are liberal and in transformational phase. Women participation in election is seen more in theses provinces.

There are number of reasons behind the slow progress of the women. Due to powerlessness, illiteracy and poverty, women are generally not taking part in economic activities and remained dependent on males. One of the respondent told, "Women want to excel but there are number of issues, one of them is financial support."[20] It seems fact that only rich and influential people can be the part of political affairs. Men belonging to modest back ground remained under stress due to economic constrains. Therefore majority of male is reluctant to take part in election so how women who are dependent on males can take part in elections even at local level.

Pakistan is a country where cultural, social and religious factors have given a very narrow space to women. They are not allowed to take part in social and economic activities. They have been compelled to undertake household responsibilities which kept them busy throughout their life cycle. Women are not free to take decision even about their education, going outside of house, marriage, number of children and about economic matters, so how they can take part in politics. They eventually lose their interest as their male family members do not give them freedom to express themselves.

Lahore is the second largest city of Pakistan and the capital of Punjab. It is also considered comparatively a modern city of the Pakistan. People here are more educated and liberal as compare to other cities of Pakistan. It is seen that even in Lahore educated women do not take part in political affairs. Only a small number of female participates in political matters.

Academic Session: Women Empowerment through Local Representation of Power

These women are generally asked to take part in politics by their male family members just to enhance their political power. Their male members compel them to do politics for their own advantage. Most of women politicians are not conscious about their rights and reluctant to make better the conditions of female community. It is also observed that when the condition of bachelor degree became compulsory to contest election in Pakistan, most under graduate politicians brought forth their graduate female family members in politics at all level of representations. Although the representation was there but there was no 'say' and free will in real terms. It is found that no free will is provided to women to participate in the elections. Due our cultural restrictions and male domination, women are not empowered. One of the respondent said "Males don't want us to be empowered so they don't allow women to be in politics"[21]

Sometimes, male political leaders as well as parties are not supportive to them. Political parties are made to train the people in the art of state craft. However political parties in Pakistan have become the centers of family politics. Generally political parties use women just to secure the reserved seats in the assemblies. Political leaders prefer their female family members to fill the reserved women seats in the assemblies. And generally female political workers have been ignored and neglected. Although these party workers are political aware and come from grass root level. One of the respondents told, "In our political system only money matters not the work."[22] Nominated females belonged to the family of leaders and don't have awareness or know how of the political matters so they are weak. Such representation can be called 'Puppet representation' and were show piece and don't have any political contradiction.

Some female members of houses remain absent from the sessions and their male family members operates on their behalf's. It is also extracted that some people use their females in politics to make them known and influential.

Though woman have very limited social space but they have prospects of growth. Social acceptance for female in politics is missing, a lady politician said, "We face problems, because male dominating societies don't accept us."[23] It is noticed Women in politics do not seem empowered as majority of them are being dictated by the male family members. Women empowerment is not achieved instantly but gradually when women will strive for their rights and create their own space. At the time of election when economic support is required to contest election the female party workers are left alone.

In Pakistani politics, it is observed that women take part mostly on reserved seats and avoid general elections. A lady political told, "General election is purely a game of money." [24] It is observed that seats are sold and preference is given to influential families not ordinary workers. Economic resources are not provided and party does not support female workers. It's hard for common woman to survive in politics but "when you have political background, your male family members support you" [25] In Pakistan females are used to bargain the power for their male family members. Need of the hour is to encourage women participation and the contest should be between female members. Female political workers are encouraged and supported more as they are trained and belonged to grass root level. Majority of the women who contest elections on the reserved seats they must work to come up on general seats as well. More attention should be given on the female education as, "Women want to come but they are not educated. Uneducated women got pressurized"[26] Another said, "Females who are educated and trained can't be misused"[27] For the real empowerment local bodies system should be promoted "Local bodies develop direct relations with people to people and discuss their problems"[28] and local representation must be used as a training centers.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Pakistan has experienced strong central governments for a long period whereas decentralization is a rear thing. Decentralization of power can be reflected through local governments that are made to empower the individual's grassroots level. Decentralization brings empowerment of people and participatory democracy because it provides opportunities to involve even the weak segments of the society. So empowerment will lead towards social, economic and political development.

Women in Pakistan are deprived from psychological to physical freedom and their political representation remaines questionable. Factors like poverty, illiteracy, male-domination and economic and social constrains have been remained pronounce. Although representation of women was there but their real and meaningful political participation remained missing. There is need to empowerment them at institutional and individual level. Moreover female political workers, who are educated, trained and coming from grass root level, are not provided with opportunities to be part of decision making. So it is observed that female representation is just a 'Mask Representation' and practically these women do not acquire power.

Local government is the best mean to interact with the people of the area and involve them in the decision making. Moreover through the local government accountability can be ensured and people may be made vigilant about their representatives. Women in political spheres are in a small number, more drastic change was witness in the local governments of 2000-2001, where "woman were provided 33 percent representation at all three tiers of local governance through special quota."[29] According to Mittra "reservation of women in local government, it is not just a question of getting a certain number in: it also develops their capacity to play their rightful roles in the development process and makes an important difference as the local government's deals mostly with the quality of life for citizens. Municipal responsibilities relate both to women's

practical needs and their strategic needs. The better we meet women's strategic needs, the better they are able to contribute to good city governance. Good local governance in turn enables a better response to women's practical needs."[30] Indeed women meaningful representation at local level will lead towards their real empowerment.

     There are some of the recommendations to have speedy empower of the women.

1. Education of females should be made compulsory, free and accessible.
2. Women should be given separate electorate according to their population ration where they may contest election and cast their votes.
3. Strengthening Local System: It is being noticed that most democratic governments remained reluctant and didn't delegate powers; so they never made local bodies functional in real terms. In our political set up even ordinary males are not empowered, political elite want concentration of power. They don't want to empower the local bodies system as they may loss some of the powers. There is need to change the mind set and culture of political elite. Strengthening the local government must be the top agenda item of the government. For successful local government system fair elections should be undertake on regular intervals.
4. Encouraging Women: At individual level there is a dire need to make aware and realized women that they should speak out for their rights and demands. Their confidence can be developed if women have been given motivation and awareness. They should come forward and strive for their rights and political space.
5. Pressure building Strategies
6. To build pressure on the decision making authorities, the involvement of print, electronic and social media could be a very effective tool. So the pressure should be built upon government and political parties to go for people empowerment at grass root level.
7. NGOs should start advocacy and campaigning for women political involvement and for their rights by arranging seminars, workshops and walks.
8. Political parties should take lead and fix a percentage for women according to their population ratio to empower and accommodate them in the political institutions.
9. The religious leaders should also stress in their address (*khutabas*), teaching about the political empowerment of women.
10. One bread winner system should be replaced. All adult family members particularly women should be involved in economic activities. Economic empowerment will lead to their political empowerment.
11. *Panchya*t and *jirga* means a group of senior people who are wise enough to take responsibility of the decision making, for the people of area who are in problem. This system is quite old but still working in rural and tribal settings. Generally male member of the society are part of it. It would be a good idea to promote panchyat culture but with a condition that women should also be part of it. A separate women panchyats can be set up where women should tackle the issues of women. It would give them the feeling of recognition and encouragement to handle their own issue.
12. Political education must be made a part of syllabus even at the primary level and people should take it as its responsibility and duty to get involved in the political affairs.
13. Need of the hour is to develop progressive approach and come out from the old dogmas. One should get transform according to the demands of the current times of the world; otherwise we would be left behind.
14. Role of the women politicians is also very important as they have the responsibility to work for the betterment of female. They are working as trustees of the rights of those whom they are representing. In this regard role of female councilor**s** is extremely important, who are working at the local level and more close to the people. Female voters should vote for those who are in favors of their empowerment.

     Pakistan is a federal state, where powers are shared between the center and provinces and then further at the local level. In Pakistan women remained to be suppressed in many spheres of life so for strengthen them they need to be in decision-making to defend themselves. It's better to take an initiative from local bodies and make it effective, for that matter involvement of them is important. Moreover democracy can be successful when participatory mechanism is there. These representatives should be scrutinized for good governance and participatory democracy. To make the women empowered only their 'mask representation' is not sufficient. They should be educated and give equal opportunities in social, economic and political spheres. Government should launch a campaign with the help of media and civil society to bring change in the approach and attitude of people towards women folk. They should not be considered inferior and subservient but equal, complete human being with dignity and respect. To give the women better position and conditions 'bottom up approach' should be incorporated in our system. So one cannot reject the hypothesis that 'women meaningful and appropriate representation at local bodies will lead towards their empowerment'. Indeed better the political participation of females more the tolerance level in society and eventually it will lead toward a peaceful country having sustainable economy.

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Department of Political Science, GC University, Lahore, Pakistan

SOCIO-POLITICAL OBSTACLES TO WOMEN'S POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT: PERSPECTIVES OF WOMEN MEMBERS OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN AZAD JAMMU AND KASHMIR

Tasmia Matloob [*]
Zakia Batool

Abstract: *The present study is based on qualitative research approach, this study primarily analyzed the nature of obstacles for women's access to political empowerment in Azad Jammu and Kashmir. This study measured the problems of women under the socio-cultural context of patriarchal structure, gender role ideologies and role of caste system. To meet the objectives of the present research, in-depth interviews were conducted from thirty women members of three different political parties in Azad Jammu and Kashmir. Results showed that ideologies regarding women's status and role fairly influence their access to political leadership. The mechanisms and practices of political parties and political culture is dominantly patriarchal which is reflected in terms of party norms, rules, elections, selection of candidates and access to opportunities where women face discrimination at all levels. This study is a significant contribution both in theoretical and practical perspectives. . For theoretical perspective, it provides a deep insight by adopting multi level analysis of the issue. In practice, this study provides a context specific understanding regarding women's participation in the political processes in the socio cultural context of Azad Jammu and Kashmir. The study may also be used as a baseline by other researchers to analyze women's political participation from multiple angles in the context of Azad Jammu and Kashmir.*

Keywords: Socio-political factors, political empowerment, women members, Azad Jammu and Kashmir

Introduction

Social structure and culture are considered as the primary determinants of women's participation in public life. South Asia (most densely populated geographic region in the world) is the southern region of the Asian continent, which comprises of sub-Himalayan countries, constitute over one fifth of the world's population. South Asia consists of Bangladesh, Bhutan, the Republic of India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. This region holds impressive records of women as head of the states, but it does not reflect that substantial progress has occurred at lower levels where common women may enjoy a better political status. The political and social context of this region tells us different story. (The number of women as constituents is still fragile despite some improvements. In most cases, women are not registered as voters in the rural parts of South Asian countries. Women face challenges to participate as independent voters where they are not free to cast their vote as independent individual voters (Shaheed, 2010). A great disparity is found between male and female registered voters in Pakistan. As in some areas of the KPK and Baluchistan, women are not free to exercise their right to vote. Shaheed (2010) argues that women's mobility, career and life choices are controlled by family, tribe, *baradari* and local customs in Pakistan, and even voting is done as a member of the clan, not as an individual

It is noticeable that within the South Asian region, women experience a subordinate position in public decision making which is acknowledged as structural in nature. Women face discrimination due to the pervasive male dominated political structure at all levels (Bari, 2005). Women's subservience in politics in South Asia is due to the patriarchal control where politics is defined as totally a male dominated activity. Prevalence of masculine model of politics, the competitive and confrontational environment discourages women's participation in politics (Samarasinghe, 2000).

In the present study the role of women in politics in Azad Jammu and Kashmir has been analyzed under the socio cultural context by using multiple indicators which are divided into different themes. The study has examined multiple indicators/factors to get more in-depth and holistic understanding of the issues related to women's political participation in Azad Jammu and Kashmir. For this study, literature has arranged under two major themes to measure women's political participation, and to get deep in-sight about the issue.

In line with developed themes, this study has explored the nature of structural and political obstacles for women members of political parties to present their own agenda and interests at party level. The relevant literature on obstacles for women in politics is discussed in accordance with the developed themes in the literature review section. Next section presents the research methodology for this study. The last section presents the results, discussions, findings and future implications of the study.

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[*] MPhil Scholar (Email: tasmia.matloob@yahoo.com).

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Literature Review

Social Context and Challenges for Women's Political Empowerment: Ronal Inglehart and Pippa Norris (2003) argues that broader patterns of societal values and priorities (public and private dichotomy) always have direct influence on people's perceptions regarding appropriate roles for women and men in the society. This public and private dichotomy is often justified through the use of patriarchal and religious interpretations. Cultural traditions stemming from religious discourses influence women's participation in public life. Religion, culture, gender roles ideologies are used as the most dominant explanations to place women within the private sphere. According to Kunovich and Paxton (2005) ideas about status of women and their roles have significant impact on women's participation in public life, and can restrain women' access to political empowerment even in the presence of favorable political system. Women's participation in the political processes is influenced by their culturally expected roles in the society. Within the South Asian region, women's status is primarily linked within the private sphere of home that places restrictions on their mobility outside four walls of the home (Saher, et al 2012). Patriarchy and gender inequality are deciding and strong factors of South Asian region**.** Women's under representation in political processes can be better analyzed in the context of gender and patriarchy in this region. Van Zooneen (1999) defines gender as social, cultural, and psychological traits associated with maleness and femaleness (Van Zooneen, 1999). On the other hand, patriarchy is structuring of society on the basis of family units where fathers have primary responsibility of the welfare of their families. These relations are rooted in the ideology of asymmetry, domination and subordination between men and women (Shaheed, 2010; Mumtaz, 2005).Unequal distribution of roles and responsibilities/relationship under patriarchal structure dominated women's lives and systematically subjugate them in all areas of life.

Within the context of Pakistan, women's participation in public decision making is restricted due to multiple cultural factors. These factors have a strong influence on the professional choices of women in the public life. Lyon (2002) reveals that 'Pakistani society is characterized by the social stratification which is compensatory in nature'. Collective self-identity; asymmetrical relationship and gender considerations are the basic values of Pakistani culture. Extended family system, hierarchy of male domination, simplicity and women's respect are [the] basic constituents of indigenous culture of Pakistan in which women are enjoying great respect and protection. Women are protected, and not allowed by their families to interact with non-kin males, to move alone as it is matter of family's respect and honor. Women's spaces are defined and often segregated from male spaces and presence of women in the male space is often taken as provocative and offensive. The structure of Pakistani culture encourages women to be humble in conversation and modest in their actions (Ali and Angela, 2008). Whereas the political life require assertive behavior which is not culturally appreciated for women

Women are excluded from political processes due to the traditional attitudes towards their roles in decision-making and leadership. Women are principally defined in relations to the family and considered innately inferior to man. Political system is built on the public-private dichotomy and most thinkers, philosophers considered and justified women's role as naturally suitable for domestic and private sphere. According to Aristotle, "*With regard to the differences between the sexes, man is by nature superior and leading, women inferior and led*" (Jonasdottir, 1998; Rai, 2000).Socialization, particularly stereotyping regarding women's roles reinforces the notion about political decision making as men's domain. Most personality traits associated with the political leadership (dominance, authority, assertiveness, rationality, emotional stability, ambition, confidence and self-sufficiency) are considered as masculine in its nature. It is common perception that women are communal, and traits such as kindness, helpfulness, concern for others, warmth and gentleness, so in politics it is very difficult for women to fully participate in this profession at all levels. Socialization theorists associate these attitudes with the early life experiences acquired through formative agencies of home, family, schools and workplaces. According to Corner (2005) women are marginalized by a variety of processes that begin in early life. In most societies, girls, in contrast to boys, are kept largely within the household and family where they are protected and taught to accept the decisions that others i.e. parents, teachers, brothers make on their behalf. Under these cultural patterns, women don't consider themselves capable for politics and many women psychologically internalize that perhaps politics is not for them (Shaheed, 2010).

Ali and Akhtar (2012) highlighted few over lapping factors (cultural legacy, the-class based socio-economic and political structure, patriarchal practices, and the role of religion in the polity) as important determinants of women's subservience in the political processes of Pakistan.

Caste System: According to Ahmad and Naseem (2011) political culture constitutes both the political ideals and operational norms of a polity. This process is found in every political system in accordance with the behavior and political education of its culture.

Mumtaz(2005) argues that political context reflects the social framework of a particular region. Every political system has its own political culture (set of beliefs, attitudes and sentiments which underpin the operation of a political system). Ahmad and Naseem (2011) argues that there is a strong influence of social system on the political, and cultural system of a country. Every political system works according to the political culture of its region. Bari (2005) highlighted that obstacles to women's political empowerment reside in the prevailing social and economic regimes as well as in the existing

Department of Political Science, GC University, Lahore, Pakistan

political structure. There is an influence of many blended cultures on the social system of sub- continent, and one of the most important elements of this social system is caste system. Social system of Casteism or *Biradarism* has deep impact on political alignments of people in the subcontinent. There is strong influence of this powerful cultural element on the political system of Pakistan. The caste system (known as *zat/biradari* in Pakistan) can be defined as a social system of caste hierarchies which allows little mobility out of the position to which a person is born. This dominating factor (*biradarism*) is strong determinant of voting behavior at national as well as at local levels. But its impact is stronger at rural and local level elections where caste is taken as the primary determinant for voting. At local level, these election campaigns are organized on the basis of *biradri* (tribes and clans) (Wilder, 1999).

In Pakistani political culture, there is strong influence of *biradari* unity, and it is considered more durable than any ideological unity of a political party. Biradari plays an essential role not only at local level elections, but also during awarding of tickets to candidates running for National Assembly. Mughees Ahmed (2004) has identified the effects of elections where candidates are selected by their associations to particular castes. He argues that under this political culture, the ties of family, faction and caste (*biradari*) are strong determinants of political loyalties of people. Most importantly the degree of patronage determines one's political power in his/her respective area. In this political culture (based on the caste system of machine politics), government does not focus to formulate and implement public policies at large, but to adjust their own constituents into jobs and in other words, doing out patronage in the form of government jobs. It is necessary to promote oneself as a strong candidate for party ticket and have strong support of major *biradari* for success in political culture of Pakistan. The voters cast their votes voluntarily to their own *biradari* for their own success.

Stephen Lyon, in his PhD dissertation 'Power and Patronage' has also highlighted the influence of this cultural pattern on the political processes in the context of Pakistan. He has critically examined the role of patronage in the relationship between politicians, civil servants and ordinary citizens. He argues that a state's political process is the reflection of its culture - where the networks of human resources are important to enter into the political game. The main aim of individuals involve in state mechanism is to protect the priorities of their networks by sharing resource capitalization within that specific human resource networks. According to Lyon (2002) State politics is an extension of basic principle of cultural relationship which is found at all levels of society; patron/client. In the formal political structure of a state, personal relationships are more important than logical rules. The alliances are created on patron based distribution of resources and contacts. Khilji (2003) also has highlighted this perspective and states that social connections and interactions generally take precedence over rules in contemporary organizations of Pakistan. Khilji (2004) further highlights that family centered mores of local culture are explicitly reflected in the organizations which are working in Pakistan. Saher and Mayhofer (2013) has also highlighted the importance of Institutions such as "*Biradari*" and *VartanBhanji* (social allegiance) in the selection and promotion of a candidate in a formal setting in Pakistani organizations. Bano (2009) highlighted that lack of social capital (support of networks) is one of the most significant factor for women's disadvantageous position in politics. Women are often not the head of tribes, communities, or kinship group that results in the absence of constituent for them which is a leading factor for political survival in Pakistan.

Access to material resources and finances is considered as a crucial factor for having power and influence in many social contexts. The status of women in Pakistani society is secondary to men where power and economic resources are mainly owned and controlled by men. A clear gender gap is found in education, economic activity and employment of women (NCSW, 2010; Bano, 2009). This gap reflects women's lower status as compared to men in Pakistani society. Women's limited access to financial resources affects their decision making power both within family and in public sphere. Women's less access to ownership of productive resources limits their scope of political activities as politics has increasingly become commercialized (Ballington & Matland, 2004).

According to Ali and Akhtar (2012) obstacles to women's equal political participation are deeply embedded in the cultural patterns of South Asian region. Patriarchal nature of these societies restricts women's entry into the bureaucratic and political institutions. Women participation is also affected by the competitive nature of politics itself where it is taken as a lucrative source of income and power which men attempts to control. Gender socialization remains a barrier for women, particularly in traditional, patriarchal societies where men have traditionally been positioned as "breadwinners" and accustomed to raising money for their own use. Where women are traditionally relegated to the private sphere, they are not typically accustomed to raising funds on their own behalf.

Profile of Azad Jammu and Kashmir

Azad Kashmir is a self- governing state, having its own elected president, prime minister, high court, and official flag. It is the Southern political entity under the control of Pakistan. The state is administratively divided into three divisions (Muzaffarabad, Mirpur and Poonch). These divisions are further sub-divided into ten districts. Legislative Assembly comprises of 49 members with only 10% representation for women. Women don't have a defined quota/proportion at party level.

Academic Session: Women Empowerment through Local Representation of Power

Meterials and Methods

Universe and Target Population of the Study" The universe of the study is comprised of women politicians from different political parties in Azad Jammu and Kashmir. Currently, there are seven political parties active in Azad Jammu and Kashmir. Women members from three different parties have been selected purposively. These parties include; i) Pakistan People's Party (AJK), ii) Pakistan Muslim League (N), AJK and iii) Muslim Conference (AJK). The reason behind selection of these parties is their strong hold in the political history of Azad Jammu and Kashmir as compare to other parties.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique: The target population of the study was women members from three different political parties. The researchers have purposively selected 30 women members (10 from each party) for in-depth interviews. Ten (10) face to face and twenty (20) telephonic interviews were conducted from women politicians of Azad Jammu and Kashmir. These members occupy different positions within the parties. Profile of the respondents is in attached in the appendix.

Thematic Analysis: Thematic analysis has been used in this study. For analyzing the existing data, deductive qualitative content analysis was conducted as proposed by Leedy and Ormrod (2001). The themes were generated and coded after thorough study of the literature. The data then received from the respondents was coded. The responses also helped to develop new themes and sequencing the initial themes. Selected quotes from these interviews are used to support both findings and discussion of the results. Some of the quotes are also included in the research for further clarity. Names the respondents are kept confidential as per their request.

Results and Discussions

Results show that women's position in politics is shaped by their social and political relations in the society. Women's actions are defined under the cultural conception of gender roles for men and women as highlighted by Shaheed (2010). According to some of the respondents, it was very difficult for them to enter into the field of politics that directly challenges the cultural notion of women's mobility and interaction. Politics is a profession where a political worker has a direct dealing with public, and it also demands frequent travelling which is culturally not acceptable and appreciated for women.

As it was shared by one of the respondent

In our society, it is not easy for a woman to make her space/place in politics. Socially, it is a less appreciated field. When I decided to join this profession, first, I analyzed my position/status in family and society. Then I realize that how can I work within the existing structure of our society. That's why in the initial stage of my career I always took my brother with me for so many reasons to attend difficult activities.

According to responses, at social level, women's career choices are strictly controlled by family. Woman is always taken as a symbol of respect and dignity for her family so they are not allowed by their families to join a profession where women's mobility and respect can easily be questioned. Women have to be more conscious regarding their professional choices. Some shared that despite having a good number of women's graduates in law and political science; women don't choose the field for themselves. Some shared that politics as a profession is not based on ideology, merit, performance, and actual social work for people in our society. Men are more aware about the inside game rules of this profession, so they don't want their females to indulge in this profession. According to one member:

It's not about that women can't compete in politics, but most important thing is that our existing social structure is male dominated. The society doesn't prefer this field for women because politics is perceived as the most insecure/disrespected profession for girls and daughters.

According to some of the respondents they were always encouraged to believe that politics is much complicated for them to understand, so it's better for them to leave everything on men. Respondents shared that they didn't experience a healthy and supportive environment in their party organization. However, it was their own determination, and commitment that helped them to succeed in this male dominated profession

One member shared that women are always taken as a weaker sex in our society, and especially when one is alone or single. This is reflected in society's attitude. Some shared that women's active involvement is always a threat to males especially for those traditional leaders who don't have strong educational background and are less familiar with actual and formal political processes. Women members also shared that they don't face any kind of issue regarding male's attitude at

visible level. But when they come in competitive environment, male colleagues create more invisible barriers for them. "Males' attitude is encouraging as far as we don't challenge their positions".

These respondents associated women's less representation with more personal/psychological factors linked with structural factors that affect their participation in politics. One respondent shared that women have to face these social cultural barriers from society as it is reflected at all levels. It needs time to change this attitude especially when women are not accepted to be suitable for a particular profession. Another member shared that unless, women don't have political willingness to sacrifice themselves, they can't come forward in politics.

According to one member

I don't think women face more problems to enter into politics due to their gender. There are many other professions where women are working and have direct dealings with males. But for politics, women have to be more confident, bold, politically aware, and trained to survive.

"One needs to have a goal and a vision to participate in politics. Women can be very good leaders, but it require continuous struggle, self-determination, political spirit and ideology". One respondent explained that before joining this profession, women have to keep in mind all the pros and cons associated with it, especially when they don't have supportive environment. It is a challenge for them to survive in male dominated field and to maintain their prestige, dignity and self-respect.

Respondents shared that women's participation in politics is affected by structural and situational factors. It is not an easy task for women to succeed in politics and get high positions in the party. In the initial stages to come forward in politics, a good amount of money is required for the candidate. This aspect creates a major hindrance for women to launch her election campaign, establish/build name recognition and gain an exposure. According to the respondents, the way different political campaigns are organized and elections are held, gives a message that politics is not for women in Pakistani society. Organizing a procession for party is un-imaginable task when one does not have any kind of financial resources available. Men are at advantageous position in politics because they have more exposure of public life, and it is easy for them to use other means (access to financial resources, personal terms, and most importantly use of "*bradari*" as a tool to come forward). It is something which is not easy for a woman in Pakistani society. Most of the time, women are not able to come forward because of the nature of political activities which demand merely a show of power. Mostly associated this with is women's poor economic standing in society where strong financial and social position is crucial for survival in politics. Some respondents shared that it's a game of money and power in which women are held back due to several reasons. According to most of the respondents, participation and survival in politics for women are two different things

According to some of our respondents:

It is very important to have economic resources to survive in politics. Economic resources matter not only in arranging a public meeting, but also in attending and having access to these meetings. I don't appreciate the existing political structure. Politics is about serving your people. Here in our region politics is associated with the Wadeera (landlords/elites). It has made politics and leadership something that is un-imaginable for women where strong political and economic background is compulsory requirements to be able to exercise your authority and position in the society.

Responses of the participants revealed that situational factors such as burden of family responsibilities also affect women's priorities which in turn place politics as second or third priority. Women find less time for effective political participation due to the double burden of productive and reproductive spheres. Respondents shared that it was quite challenging to carry a political life with very young children. Some shared that they joined politics when they were almost free from motherhood responsibilities.

According to one member

As a political worker, time for my family remains a biggest challenge for me. The nature of work involves continuous struggle ranges from daily meetings with public, travelling and accomplishment of office assignments and tasks. Sometimes it creates stress and tension, but once you have devoted yourself for others, you have to sacrifice many things. As a mother, it is big challenge to sacrifice my family time for my political commitments.

Women's participation is severely affected by the culture of formal political structure which is pervasively male dominated almost in all parts of the world. Our findings show that women's role in party organization is strongly influenced by the social and political context of this region. Parties are dominantly patriarchal in their party rules and regulations.

There is strong influence of "*Bradari*" (caste system) in political culture where strong references and caste affiliations/associations play significant role for promotions in the party organization. Members shared that politics and power positions are mostly taken as inherited, and seats are already specified for some specific members.

Women's selection by party is most crucial stage for women's access to political decision making. Mostmembers highlighted that the recruitment process of party members for different positions is not transparent. It is the party leaders who have all the authority to decide positions for party members. Most members are given executive positions within the party who don't have any kind of political experience, but hold strong power in his/her respective area. Lovenduski pointed out that party ideology towards women's political participation is reflected in terms of how many women are nominated, where they are placed on party lists, and what proportion is given to them. Respondents showed their strong concerns for women's proportion in party and legislative levels. Many respondents associated women's marginalized status in politics with their less proportion both at party and legislative level. For them it was the only way to promote women in political decision making. Representative at district level:

> Women's proportion at party and legislative level is the most important issue for us. We have given several recommendations to the party for increasing women's proportion up to 25% at legislative and 40 to 50% at party level. This increase will have very positive effects for women.

Some of them criticized the role of women present in legislative level for not asking a defined quota and more proportion for women at party level. There were other members who focused on the effectiveness of women's positions rather than on more proportion both at party and legislative level. For them having more proportion will not have sound effect for women unless their positions are truly recognized and appreciated by the party leaders. They criticized party's less serious attitude for women political empowerment and associated this with overall societal attitude towards women's role in public decision making.

> It is not about a certain proportion for women in politics at party and legislative level. I think, it is more important for women to have a say/voice at different levels. It is my experience that even at legislative level, women face numerous challenges to present and share their issues and concerns. At party level their position becomes more vulnerable as they do not have any say in the decision making processes.

Representatives at district level shared that they are trying their best at personal level to make system more effective within the existing resources available to them. But most important aspect is less recognition and acknowledgement of their activities from the party leaders.

According to the respondents, many suggestions for women's effective participation were presented to party leaders, but in return they did not receive any positive response from the party administration. Respondents of one party, at district level, shared that they always presented their own agenda to the party administration regarding women's participation, but always only a specific committee was established to look into the issue. According to one of the respondents: "Party should provide a good platform to women so that they face less trouble in this field, and where they can experience and polish their abilities".

One member shared that these seats do not have any practical significance for women. She shared her experience of central executive committee meeting of her party. She explained that committee was reluctant to give a party ticket to a male candidate because his chances for success were lower despite having very strong political base. Anothr male member had very strong affiliation with party president and was a strong financial supporter for the party. It was a tough decision for party president to decide other candidate from his area as it was already decided that he (male candidate) will receive at least one seat in assembly. Party president assured him for one seat by convincing him that he will bring her sister or wife on women's seat from other area by providing him all the possible political support.

Many of the respondents shared that mostly it happened that they were just informed about the decisions already taken by their party. One member shared her experience about the allocation of college lecturer seats in her district. She shared that the seats were allocated to members who had strong reference of *Biradari* with the President and Prime Minister of AJ&K. She was less authoritative in her respective area. She shared that it always becomes very difficult for them to deviate from the president's decision. One member highlighted the issue of development funds for members on reserved seats. She explained that the members on reserved seats had to face many problems regarding development funds for their respective areas as compared to members who come on direct seats.

Conclusion

The paper was aimed to explore the nature of socio-political obstacles for access to political empowerment of women members of political parties in Azad Jammu and Kashmir. The study highlighted that women's political empowerment is tight with complex and intertwined factors. From political point of view, dominant masculine political system does not appreciate women's participation where men are considered as traditional custodians of this field. Women face serious challenges of financial resources, less exposure of public life and less political capital as compare to men. Furthermore, social and cultural views about women's roles create more obstructs for women to participate effectively in this field. The members emphasized

on the political consciousness among women as an important element to achieve their right status in politics. Networking among women members, and their links with civil society was also highlighted by the members which can help them to overcome all these obstacles.

The study has limitations regarding the sample size of respondents, but keeping in view the proportion of women in political parties, selected sample justifies main objectives of the study. Despite limitations, this study is a valuable contribution as there is no other academic research available on the nature of political participation of women in Azad Jammu and Kashmir. this is first study that has explored the experiences of women members of political parties regarding the nature of hindrances for their effective participation in politics. The research is highly useful for academician, policy makers, women politician as well as for general masses to understand the social-political obstacles for women political participation in the context of Azad Jammu and Kashmir. The study also provides a baseline for other researches to study women's political participation in Azad Jammu and Kashmir.

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HIERARCHY OF WOMEN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND INCOMMENSURABILITY BETWEEN WOMEN REPRESENTATION AND EMPOWERMENT IN SOUTH ASIA: PAKISTAN IN PERSPECTIVE

M. Usman A. Siddiqi [*]

Abstract: *Political empowerment of women is considered the highest level of women empowerment, and a result and indicator of socio-economic empowerment of women, which in turn ensures the continuity of the latter kind of empowerment. This paper analyzes the unfortunate incommensurability between political representation and socio-economic empowerment of women in South Asian societies by employing available lines of arguments: a) challenging the criterion of representation; b) post-structuralist critique and Foucauldian concept of power – the one that challenges the whole idea of empowerment through legislation and state policies – and c) attributing the incommensurability to the missing stages of hierarchy of women political participation. In doing so, the paper identifies a gap between lowest and highest levels of women participation in South Asian societies and highlights the gap between the state laws and laws of truth imposed by knowledge borne by socio-cultural norms of Pakistani society.*

Keywords: Women empowerment, woment political participation, women representation, South Asia, Pakistan

Introduction

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%,[1] 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 paper analyzes 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 paper presents a detailed situational analysis highlighting the incommensurability between political representation and socio-economic empowerment of women in Pakistan and analyzing the available lines of arguments for this incommensurability. The concluding segment highlights the pattern of women political participation in Pakistan and identifies a gap between its lowest and highest levels.

Representation and Women Empowerment in Pakistan

Pakistan 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 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.

Pakistan has also witnessed women leaders of national stature before and after partition. Begum Shah Nawaz, Begum Shaista Ikramullah, Begum Ra'ana Liaqat Ali Khan, Miss Fatima Jinnah, Begum Salma Tassaduq Hussain, Abadi Begum, 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 woman as head of national government, the overall picture of women representation in national legislature has been gloomy since 1947.

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%. 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

[*] Lecturer, Department of Political Science, GC University, Lahore, Pakistan (Email: write2siddiqi@live.com).

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 legislative assemblies 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)[2] on women parliamentarian's performance during 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 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 percent… The female representatives moved 42 Resolutions." (FAFEN, 2012, pp. 1-4)

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) and 127th in Gender Inequality Index (GII) of 187 countries of the world. Socio-cultural practices in Pakistan pose serious threats to women empowerment in Pakistan. Forced or early age marriages, so-called honor killings (Karo Kari), dowry killings, *Purdah*, *Watta Satta*, *Swara* and *Wani*, and 'Marriage to Quran,' perpetuate subjugation of women in Pakistani society. Women's access to education, healthcare, and gainful employment is limited because of socio-cultural and economic constraints.

Socio-cultural and economic indicators of women empowerment draw a deplorable image of Pakistani society. 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.

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, and 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 off springs, 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 then why this performance of women on reserved seats has not been 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 three lines of arguments in response to this question: the first one challenges the representation criterion or process through which these women elites come to power; second argument challenges the whole idea of bringing change through legislation and state policies; and the third argument attributes the prevalent incommensurability to the missing stages of the women political participation in Pakistan. Let's apply both of them to analyze the relation between political empowerment through representation and socio-economic empowerment of women.

The reserved seats are allocated to political parties as per their general seats in legislative assemblies on the basis of list system. But who gets to represent women 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 "once again grabbed a lion's share of the reserved seats for women in both the National Assembly and provincial assemblies" (Gishkori, 2013, May 30). 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, [2013] are now members of the assemblies via the reserved seats route" (Gishkori, 2013, May 30).

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 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. 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 are elected on general 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 not 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. 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 favor their real empowerment. 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 honor'? 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?

Third explanation is based on Musai, Alehashem, and Abhari's model of socio-political participation of women (2014), which outlines a hierarchy of women political participation, haing non-involvement in politics at the lowest level and then identifying following levels as higher ones in women political participation: voting, participation in informal political discussions, passive membership in organization or political party, participation in public societies, demonstrations etc, and having formal political position (governmental). Musai, Alehashem, and Abhari are of the view that an indigenous movement for political empowerment of women would be the one achieved as a result of these steps of political participation.

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. 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.

Political empowerment is indeed highest level of women empowerment, which results from socio-economic empowerment, 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 the latter. If political empowerment comes through socio-economic empowerment, it would definitely strengthen and perpetuate socio-economic empowerment of women.

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[1] 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.

[2] 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.

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