

A Quest for Women Empowerment in Pakistan: A Case of Jamaat- e- Islami (JI)

Nayab Kanwal

M.Phil Scholar

Department of Pakistan Studies
GCUF Faisalabad

Dr. Muhammad Waris Awan

Assistant Professor

Department of Pakistan Studies
GCUF Faisalabad
drwarisawan35@gmail.com

Dr Farzana Zaheer Syed

Assistant Professor

Higher Education Department
fazanasyed@gmail.com

Abstract

Women are half of the world's population but are considered inferior to men when it comes to status, ability, and skills. Nearly two billion people in the world are poor and out of those two-third are women. Women get very nominal amount for their work in spite of their hard work and also because their 60% work is unpaid. In Pakistan women have fewer opportunities in all spheres of life .Jamaat e Islami, a religious political party fight for the rights of women in the limits of religion since its formation. The study has focused on the contributions of the Jamaat e Islami to empower women in Pakistan .A qualitative method with exploratory approach used to find out the answers of the research questions. It is find out that Jamaat always took initiatives to empower women through their participation in politics. All political parties must come forward to empower women in Pakistan through their given religion based rights. No development can sustain without women participation because women rights are human rights.

Key words: Jamaat e Islami, Women empowerment, Rights, Human rights, Politics

Introduction:

“The West has raised the alarm about women's rights in Pakistan, although the [poor] status of women in Western societies becomes obvious to even a casual visitor to any of those societies. Th ere is no doubt that women in our country are being victimized, and for the protection of women and to restore the dignity of their status Jamaate-Islami has prepared a Women's Rights Charter. This calls for education and training for women and the restoration of their social status. Towards this aim the Jamaat-e-Islami has set up a Women's Commission which comprises capable and qualifi ed women in the country.”

—Qazi Hussein Ahmed, Jamaat-e-Islami President (Ahmed, 2002)

The last two decades witnessed a sharp rise regarding the discussion on the issue of empowerment. Almost all the symposiums, workshops, meetings and seminars that is related the socio-economic progress and human development of the country discussed it. In all the policy matters that are related to fertility behavior, child welfare, demographic transition, economic growth, infant mortality, women empowerment and poverty alleviation is regarded as the most effective strategy by the major global organizations like United Nations and World Bank. Dyson and Moore defined women empowerment;

“as to vest the capacity to women to obtain information and power for decision making about her own concern and those of one’s intimates(Kabeer, 2001).”

Women formed nearly half of the world’s population and interestingly the other global half—men—are also dependent on them directly or indirectly. Yet women are considered inferior to men when it comes to status, ability, and skills (Dyson, 1983). Nearly two billion people in the world are poor and out of those two-third are women (Rahman, M. H., & Naoroze, K. 2007) . Women get very nominal amount for their work in spite of their hard work and also because their 60% work is unpaid (ESCAP.(2002). Moreover, their contributions to the world’s economy brought only 1% of the total world’s assets in their names.

The situation in the Islamic world is even tough for the women. The patriarchal social system usually refrain women from taking part in many activities which usually is allowed to them in the west like education, jobs, and participation in the politics as well. High fertility, honor killing, early marriages, scarce resources to education, limited political and economic autonomy and almost no liberty of choice are the common issues that women are facing in the entire Islamic world(UN ,2007). Women in Pakistan like any other Islamic country are also facing the same problems of gender discrimination. The patriarchal social fabric restricted their participation in the social, economic and political activities that are very important for the development of the country. Women are nearly 51% of the total population and their less participation due to social, cultural and religious reasons is a great hurdle in the socio-economic and political development of Pakistan.

Women empowerment in the power corridors is even more alarming as the women constitute nearly 50% of the country’s population however; their representation in the assemblies is only nominal. The social, cultural and religious factor here too restrained them from taking part in the political activities. A glimpse of women representation in the legislative assemblies would clearly indicate the real picture. The country exercised different political systems along with continuous military intervention. In the first constituent assembly that started his tenure from August 10, 1947 and ended on October 24, 1954, women acquired only 3% of the total seats. Out of total thirty representatives, there were only 2 women in the first assembly. In the second constituent assembly that lasted from May 2, 1955 to October 7, 1958, women had no representation where total number of representatives was 80. The pattern almost remained the same up to the period of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto. However, after the period of Zia (1978-1988) when the democratic phase started once again, the women representation in the provincial and national legislative bodies increased from 3% to 10%. 21 women were elected on reserved seats while only one woman was elected directly in the national assembly of Pakistan. However, the women representation in the provincial and national assemblies, witnessed a sharp decline in the upcoming elections of 1990, 1993, and 1997. There was no allocation of reserved seats for women at national and provincial levels 7. During the first tenure of Nawaz Sharif only 2 women were directly elected whereas in his second tenure just 6 women were elected directly (Kishor,2000).

Political instability and the inability of the civilian governments to deliver gave way to three military interventions in the politics. The decade of 1990s was an era that could be remembered a period of extreme political instability where four democratic governments were dismissed or dissolved over the charges of corruption and incompetence. The deteriorated situation of civil-military relations once again brought the military government in Pakistan when in October 1999 General Pervaiz Musharraf overthrown the elected regime of Nawaz Sharif. The Musharraf regime can be criticized for many reasons but two aspects of his tenure could be remember in the history of Pakistan as milestone towards the more and more political participation introduction of real local bodies system and women empowerment. He introduced the system of local bodies in 2000 and integral part of the system was the women empowerment where the representation of women increased to 33%. The quota was equally effective at the three levels of local bodies’ i-e union council, Tehsil and district level. While in the general election the representation of women was also

increased up to 17% in 2002. In election 2002, the number of women was 61 out of 342 in the national assembly (PILDAT,2004).

Objectives of the Study

- To examine the socio-economic status of women in Pakistan
- To analyze the role of JI in women empowerment

Research Questions

- 1- What are the social, economic, religious and political hindrances in the way of women empowerment in Pakistan?
- 2- How Jamaat e Islami viewed the women empowerment and what practical steps they took in this regard?

Research Methodology:

The qualitative method with exploratory approach use to find out the answers of the research questions. Few research questions were formulated for the study. The secondary sources bibliographies, reference books, dictionaries, encyclopedias, research articles from various Jamaat e Islami magazines, research journals, and newspapers were used for the study. Same as History books and extra accepted scholarly books on Jamaat e Islami were studies for references.

Jamaat-e Islami Pakistan: Historic Roots

In Arabic language “Jamaat” word is used for party or group of people stand for Islam, so the meaning is the group of Muslims stand for Islam. It was founded in united India in 1941 .The founding father was Mawlana Abū al-A‘lā al-Mawdūdī born in 1903 and passed away in 1979). The party aim to establish was to bring reform in society with faith with Islam and accept prophet Muhammad’s as role model in Muslim community. The Jamaat was to give a substitute to the followings of the Sufi Brotherhoods and also was made to produce leaders of experienced and religious Muslim leaders to facilitate other Muslims and direct them towards the revitalization of Islam. Although a religious party, the Jamaat was not apart for any political activity in Pakistan. Mawdūdī who opposed a sovereign Pakistan however, yielding to political veracity, he focused on Pakistan solidarity until his retirement in 1972. In 1953, the Jama‘at started a movement against “Qadiyani Group” that escort to 2,000 deaths. For two decades, Jamaat remained a voice of ‘Ulamā’ and Mshaiikh with an active participation in opposition politics even though it did prop up in 1965 and 1971 wars with India.

After Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, Jamaat stand with General Zia ul-Haq and his Islamization agenda but contrasting his endeavor to bar student unions. The Jamaat took a stand with President Saddam Hussein in Gulf War. They have been active in electoral politics and have sponsored legislation in the senate, both efforts having met with mixed success (UNDP,2005). The Jamaat also participate in anti-government protest earlier than fall of Benazir Bhutto rule in 1996. The Jammatt also opposed General Musharraf policies towards Kashmir and Afghanistan .The Jamaat remained dynamic in efforts to modification of a society according to the Islamic law.

Women Empowerment in Pakistan: A historical overview

Pakistan came into being in August 1947 as a result of long struggle. Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah was the chief architect while other prominent leaders did play their role in the formation of new country like Allam Iqbal, Liaqat Ali Khan, SardarAbdur RabNishtar etc. the male leadership’s role and their efforts in the independence movement is unforgettable while at the same time women also played their due role in this connection. Without women’s participation the dream could not be possible to achieve. The freedom movement without women’s participation would not be possible because of their numerical strength that was necessary to increase the vote bank of Muslims. Furthermore the participation of women in the political rallies showed the strength of the Muslim League during freedom movement. Mr Jinnah frequently praised the role of women in the freedom struggle and in 1940 he announced,

“Women are supposed to create a sense of general political consciousness. They should stand shoulder to shoulder with men in practical politics”(Nasr, 1994).

The announcement made a huge impact on the mobilization of women across the country and removed the tradition barriers on the movement of women to participate in the political rallies. The early demise of Muhammad Ali Jinnah pushed the country in many grave crises and one such issue was the end of women’s participation in the political activities. The political empowerment of women of whom Qauid was a great admirer suddenly came to an end. However, several determined women continued to play their political role in Pakistan in spite of the difficulties they faced during this era.

General Pervaiz Musharraf came in October 1999 by replacing the elected government of Nawaz Sharif. He became the chief executive of the country and announced his famous seven point agenda. The international and domestic compulsion restrained from fulfilling his seven point agenda. By nature he was liberal and progressive minded and declared Mustafa Kamal Atatürk as his ideal. Unlike his predecessor Zia, he brought numerous transformations in the domestic political system like political empowerment of women in the country. It was for the first time in the history of Pakistan that women’s representation was increased in the parliament, provincial assemblies and at local government level. However, the genuine demand of women organization of restoring the rule female suffrage was not implemented that was practiced in the constitution of 1956. According to this, female can vote for female candidates only. The result of ignoring the female suffrage surfaced in shape of mere puppet show where women were at the disposal of party leaders. Musharraf government took bold step by increasing the number of reserved seats of women in the election 2002 by 20% in the parliament including provincial assemblies. The increase of women’s reserve seats was not only limited to national and provincial level but also 33% seats reserved for them in the local government system(Mumtaz, K., & Shaheed,1987).

Pakistan is a multi-lingual and multi-ethnic country where various ethnicities residing having different culture, and norms. The traditional cultural values in the province of KPK and Baluchistan and especially those areas which are the strong hold of religious political parties, usually does not allow women to vote. Exactly this was happened in the elections of 2002 when nearly 31% female voters in the KPK and Baluchistan were not allowed to vote by their male members of the family. Had Musharraf been included the female suffrage in LFO, the religious parties and tradition Pashtuns and Baloch would have been brought their female family members to vote for their female candidates in the parliament and if they had failed to comply with this the women seats would have been gone to the rival parties.

This would also *“have had the advantage of making candidates for the reserved women’s seats accountable to their women voters, thus forcing the candidates to devise political agendas conductive to resolving women’s problems and helping them to achieve their due rights”*(Shami,2009). In other words,

“Women’s demands would have been presented and fought for in the assemblies by women parliamentarians, who would have had to demonstrate their dedication and record on women issues as an essential requirement for seeking re-election”(Shami,2009).

This would have been in

“stark contrast to the position that has persisted ever since the abrogation of the 1956 Constitution, whereby women parliamentarians have been beholden to their party leaders, who have virtually “nominated” them for occupying the reserved women, seats”(Shami,2009).

However in spite of missing a great opportunity to empower women politically by granting them the gift of suffrage, Musharraf did great job towards the right direction. The increase from 2% to 20% in the parliament along with 33% representation at union council and Tehsil level further strengthen the women politically .Furthermore, women were appointed as ambassadors in many countries. Indeed it was a bold step by the Musharraf government and brightens the soft image of the country abroad.

Religious Political Parties and Women Empowerment in Pakistan: Analysis of the JI

The religious political parties enjoyed full fledged power during Musharraf era when MutahidaMajlis-e-Amal (MMA) succeeded to form governments in Baluchistan and NWFP. Although the coalition lost its place in the elections of 2008, however, religious political parties still have the influence at national and provincial level. Their influence in various areas especially the legislations concerned to Islamic values is significantly remained intact. Despite of their limited populist base in Pakistan their role in the polity cannot be ignored. Pakistan is an Islamic country that came into being on the name of Islam. Nearly 96% of the population is Muslim while out of this nearly 80% are Sunnis. There are four major fractions of the Muslims in the country namely Barelvi, Deobandi, Ahle Hadith and revivalist modernist movements like Jamat-e-Islamic (JI). These fractions are usually in opposition to each other throughout the history of the country or we can say that from the beginning of their establishment.



Source: <https://jamaat.org/>

Nearly 25 religious political parties are in the political arena since the beginning. Majority of them have zero representation in the parliament and thus played the role of pressure group that believed in the agitation for the fulfillment of their agendas. As these religious political parties have limited popular base in the country so on majority of occasions they aligned with one of the leading liberal political parties like PMLN or PPP. However, out of these religious political parties JI remained significant throughout our history. Its ability to mobilize masses, their street power, strong holds in institutions, and student's wings in universities became sources of its influence on the national politics.

Jamaat-e-Islami and Its Contributions in making Pakistan

The Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) is a well organized religious political party. The party has clear lines of authority along with a well organized network of local branches across the country. The party from the beginning has a steady party platform that is dependent on the teachings and ideas of its initiator Syed Abul-Ala-Maududi. Maududi was an Islamic scholar and author of nearly 120 books and pamphlets. Maududi frequently addressed the various topics related to Islamic politics, social and economic issues of the country and Pakistani nationalism. Moreover, he also wrote the "Tafheem-ul-Quran", the most Tafseer (interpretation) read within and outside of Pakistan. The focus of the Maududi's writings was Islamic way of life that says Islam is the blue print for life. By referring Islam as way of life he included all the dimensions of life like religious, legal, political, social and economic. The principle of Islamic way of life was not only followed by his followers in the Jamaat e Islami but also the opponent religious parties in the country. In reality it was Maududi's literature that defined the limitations of Pakistan's religious political debate, while some scholars even give him the credit to introduce the concept of Islamic political party.

The JI was founded in pre-partition era by Maududi in 1941. Soon after the creation of Pakistan, the controversy arose over the nature of constitution that whether the founder of Pakistan wanted Islamic Pakistan or secular Pakistan. Jamaat e Islami after the independence is an Islamic political party who wanted the Islamization in the country and its laws and constitution. The major objective was to make the country as a role model for other Muslim countries where a small portion of highly educated and pious men could lead a revolution in the region (Maududi, 2006). After its origin in 1941, Jamaat e Islami from being an elitist revolutionary movement soon transformed into well organized political party. However, the party never let its elitist character. Power is concentrated in the hands of few usually sitting at the top hierarchal positions. No doubt that JI engaged its workers mostly belonged to lower class in a number of organizational and welfare works however as for as its politics is concerned “are irrelevant to the demands of the underprivileged”(Nasr,1994). The party for ideological inspiration, throughout its history depended upon the Maududi’s theory of “Islamic way of life”. The Jamaat since its inception and after the partition of India remained committed to the establishment of social and political system based on Sharia. The party’s manifestoes and guidelines stressed on the personal training of its workers and emphasized on their personal transformation to be obedient to Allah’s orders. The party expect from its followers to be “true Muslims”. JI presented the opposite picture of secularism where separation of religion from politics is stressed while the most to the religious political parties are of the opinion that religion and politics cannot be separated rather both can run side by side.

The JI’s poor performance in the electoral politics compelled it to find alternatives. The opportunity came when in 1979, Russia invaded Afghanistan. Zia, the military ruler with the help of western support launched war against the Russian in Afghanistan and for this purpose fully supported the Afghan Mujahedeen. JI having the strong religious orientations found an opportunity to align themselves with the military government to promote the principle of “Jihad”. While the government was busy in providing funds and training to the Afghan Mujahedeen, Jamaat e Islami used its links with the Islamic factions in Afghanistan to bring them to the table.

It was said that;

“a division of tasks took place between the Jamaat and the Pakistan army ... the Jamaat was entrusted with managing the relations with [Afghan] Islamist parties, recognizing only the latter [the Afghan mujahidin parties] as being representative of the resistance”(FrédéricGrare, 2001).

The Russians were defeated in the Afghanistan and vacated the region by April 1989 under Geneva Accord. The Jamaat e Islami then turned their attention towards Kashmir and allegedly involved in the Kashmir Jihad through its proxy organization like Al-Badar and Hizb-ul-Mujahideen(ICG,2003).

Women Empowerment in Pakistan: Role of JI

Political empowerment of women remained a subject of Islamic scholarship throughout its history. It is not only confined to Islam only rather other civilizations too victimized the women socially, politically and economically and deprived them of their basic rights based on false justification in the name of religion. Majority of the third world countries are governed through traditional and religious structures. These states with multi-ethnic and multi-cultural approaches, always confronted with worse status of women. Pakistan that came into being on the name of religion and therefore Islam remained a profound force having it deep impact over the Pakistan’s political identity. One of the major identity issues for a Muslim state like Pakistan was the creation of various ideological positions in the early phases of history when the constitution making was in progress. JI from the day first advocated and attempted for the realization of its dream of polity and society that had far-reaching repercussions for the female in public life. Furthermore, the traditional, cultural and

patriarchal orientations in the country harmed to great extent to the cause of women's political empowerment.

The process Islamization under Zia and the consequent gender based discriminatory policies further cornered the women in the Pakistani society. Zia's Islamization process was fully supported by not only JI but also by other major religious political parties as well that promoted the institutionalized gender inequalities. Consequently women were thwarted from political activism. Till the Zia regime into power corridors, the state ideology was the endorsement of Islamic modernism that advocated the political participation of women. The constitution of 1973 fully endorsed the political participation of women in Pakistan. The JI party manifesto also has separate parts for empower women,

- To give women their rights according to Quran and Sunnah
- To make them able to work for the betterment of the society
- To put an end to the non Islamic customs, dowry, marriage with Quran and Nikkah with widows
- To discourage Wanni, exchange marriages, honor killing, three time abrupt divorces,
- Separate medical colleges, universities, small industries promotion for economic betterment
- Separate sports complexes for women

The notable steps for women empowerment were taken by the JI are discussed below;

- **Women in Politics:**

The JI is a liberal religious party that always opens doors for female participation in politics and in party. Moulana Maududihad clearly said that *"The woman's sphere of activity should be separate from that of man's. They should be entrusted with separate social responsibilities according to their respective natures, and mental and physical abilities"* (Siddiqui, 2010). The JI always allowed and welcomed women in politics under strict policies of Islam (Nasr, 1994).

- **Women's wing**

The Jamaat e Islami strictly follow the given guiding principles by Moulana Moududi, so regarding his emphasis on Pardah a separate wing for women was established identified as the Halq-e-Khawateen, on February 15, 1948. The role of this wing grows significantly since its formation. This growth was made promising Maududi's changing vision on femininity. In 1971, Jamaat e Islami's disappointment to get seats in the earlier years' general elections, Maududi stressed the significance of activating women. In his speech Maududi held responsible to the party's depressing electoral recital on its tapered stand of support, and accepted that Jamaat e Islami had failed to direct adequate concentration to the fewer educated and shoddier segment of society that probable to influence the vote. Maududi axiom an exclusive prospect for the Jamaat amongst women in fastidious as women were being offered 20 National Assembly seats and in provincial assembly 23 for each province, Maududi said that women were particularly vital objective for JI's outreach an electorate that might no longer be unnoticed (Nasr, 1994).

- **Islami Jamiat Talebat**

The Islami Jamiat Talebat (an Islamic Society of girls) was created against to the surfacing of a “students’ women’s rights group” in Punjab University Lahore. The “Islami Jamiat Talebat” worked with their male members of IJT; to extend influence on campus. Similar to the Halq-e-Khawateen, the majority of the female members come from already affiliated families with the JI and IJT. The IJT come out as a supporter of a women’s university, and fight for its creation.

- **Majlis-e-Khawatin**

It was established on 1983 by the support of President Zia, who led a government with an agenda of Islamization in Pakistan. Jamaat e Islami supported the Majlis-e-Khawatin, and allowed the organization’s president, Apa Nisar Fatima elected to the National Assembly member on 1985, and gripped a reserved women’s seat. In 1984, she was also selected to the “Commission on the Status of Women”, where she write down a rebellious note to the Commission’s bulk findings that the proliferation of Islamic laws in Pakistan had been damaging to women’s rights.

- **Women Protection Bill**

The Act 2006 was a change made to the “Hudood Ordinance”, was however resisted ferociously by the JI and the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal. They boycotted the assembly secession and the MMA created pandemonium, with holding two standpoints. The JI defy the bill because it was an amendment of the celestial word of the holy Quran and unconstitutional. Jamaat e Islami argued that Protection of Women Act has nothing that was formulated to “protect” women roles as laws.

Conclusion

The phenomenon of women empowerment is getting importance both at academic level and at practical level. The Jamaat-e-Islami, is in the favor of women in religious right and opposed any act against the threat to these rights. Jamaat women with the dogma of “Purdah”, and segregation of the gender worked with the party manifesto. The Jamaat e Islami considered as a guardian of Islamic tradition and have promoted for larger female rights. Although the Jamaat’s bond to women stay clashing, as it founded on respond opportunistically to diverse political expansion than on firm devotion to party’s Islamist policy. Pakistan’s women’s participation in religious groupings has previously in use diverse forms, not every of that are radical in temperament though, this contribution is deep larger tendency in Pakistani culture toward a political course entrenched in religious values. Many Jamaat e Islami women participated and nominated as parliamentarian in Pakistan. Jamaat e Islami allowed women in politics, enhanced role in society, ideological underpinnings, established women’s wings, inaugurated Halq-e-khawateen, set up Majlis-e-khawatin, Islami Jamiat Talebat, women aid trust, offer political participation and passed women’s protection bill.

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