

WOMEN CONTRIBUTION IN PAKISTAN'S PARLIAMENT: A CASE OF LEGISLATOR'S CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES AND SOLUTIONS (2008-2018)

Muhammad Madni Asghar, (PhD Research Scholar, Political Science and Lecturer (Pakistan Studies), the Islamia University of Bahawalpur)

Dr. Safdar Hussain (Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, the Islamia University of Bahawalpur.

Abstract:

Democracy in its full forms only be ensured when women have equal rights to participate in politics. Role of women in politics is an essential element for women empowerment around the globe. Many developed countries reached their desired destination through gender equality and progressive developing countries are also following same tracks. Role of women in Pakistani politics did not remain same as proportionate to population. Women had to face many barriers including social, economic and cultural barriers which kept women marginalized for political empowerment. In 2002, President Pervez Musharraf dictatorship rule vital decision were taken for women empowerment by allocating them specific quota in National Assembly. Women did not have enough chance to participate in politics during democratic governments. Although Pakistan had great women leaders as Prime Minister, Speaker of National Assembly and at other leading roles but such examples are exception. After legislation for women protection and women empowerment there is improvement in women protection and women empowerment situation but still there is a lot of need to do. In this article, data from secondary sources is consulted to understand the women participation in parliament from (2008-2018), exploring opportunities and challenges during parliamentary business. The suggestions are made to encourage and promote women empowerment through women participation in parliament.

Keywords: Empowerment, Challenges, Opportunities, Solution and Democracy

Introduction:

In the history of Pakistan era from 2008 to 2022 may be considered as a democratic tenure as parliament had maximum to perform. Any political system without equal participation of women cannot be considered a strong system it might be called a crippled political system. Women are half of the Pakistan's population but their participation in political system is in minority. Women in Pakistan have fewer opportunities to participate in political parties and in parliament. At political parties level men have dominant role that's why women may participate in limitations. Since Pakistan independence no political remained unsuccessful to empower women socially and politically. General Pervez Musharraf was considered as dictator in history, but in his tenure women in Pakistani parliament were given quota for participation in parliament that was approximately 17%.

In developed countries that is equal opportunities for men and women and both contribute for the betterment of country. A famous political philosopher wrote in his book "The Political of Presence" said that women parliamentarian are best ambassadors of all other women to represent their issues and present solutions to those issues. If women in parliament are given strong autonomy then they may contribute for empowerment of all other women.

In every country which believes in democracy, parliament owns a central position to provide platform for solution of national issues, for legislation and develop policies to ensure implementation of laws with true spirit. There is need for women autonomy in Pakistan parliament with making parliament stronger. As women in parliament represent half of the population of the country their socio-political empowerment will also support for socio political empowerment of all women who decided their representative through political process. There are many challenges faced by Pakistan's women especially they are not included in decision making, they are not part of committees take part in laws and policies

making. When women parliamentarian will be able to perform on equal bases they will be able to solve women genuine issue without any fear or discrimination.

In this research, researchers put efforts to explore the opportunities available to women parliament, issues and challenges faced by them and suggestions for women socio-political empowerment are discussed and presented.

Literature Review:

Women role as parliamentarian is very important for their socio-political empowerment. Women parliamentarian may present women genuine problems with true spirit. Women participation in politics and legislation remained lesser as compared to men since independence of Pakistan. As per census 2017, women are almost 49% of overall population of Pakistan but their quota in National Assembly is 17.54% and in senate it is 17% (Census, 2017). According to Global Data on National Parliamentarian 2021, Pakistan ranked at 115 among all 193 countries for women empowerment, 20.2 % women are legislators in National Assembly and 19 percent in Senate. Alvi (2022)

A democratic deficit comes from women's underrepresentation at all levels of government and decision-making. Diverse groups have been shown to make better judgments time and time again. This is especially true when it comes to a difficult assignment like advocating residents' interests in the legislature. Parliament enacts significant legislation that affects both men and women's lives. In order to priorities women's practical demands and concerns, equal involvement and representation in parliamentary procedures is important (Assembly, 2007).

Around the globe women are kept ignored in political decision making and representation in parliament at equal level. There are separate decision making characteristics for each country but one feature is common for the countries that are women are not made mainstreamed part of all social activities with political independence. Women have obstacles and hindrance to participate in political decision making from individual level to parliament level which causes women less participation in parliament (Mlamb, 2019).

Women participation in political and public life is essential part of United Nation-Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As per UN findings, women are under-presented in different fields of life especially in decision making and political life. Women are serving in 22 countries as head of states, while in 119 countries there is no women leader in politics. If we see at global level, there are 04 states with 50% or more women representation in politics, it has reached 40% in 19 countries and in 27 countries it is less than 10%. Women may not be truly empowered when not included in political decisions. Participation in legislation is the only way that can lead towards women social and political empowerment (Women, 2021).

Women are elected on general seats or participated through quota proved very important for their active role in legislation. It is time to analyze at what scale women remained successful to participate in legislation and women empowerment in society. Pakistan is showing trends of women's political participation similar to those apparent on the global level. Since the partition of British India, it is observed that women's participation in political activities and role in legislation at the state level lagged behind (Reyes, 2002).

The political quota reservation as a strategy to give inclusion to disadvantaged groups in political decision-making has been in place since the very beginning of the country's independent history. The quota allocated for women remained nominal in showing any positive effects throughout the second half of the 20th century. With the start of the 21st century, Pakistan introduced higher quotas for women in parliament, as the quota trend was becoming popular throughout the globe. The enhanced quota increased the number of women in parliament in a short time. The "critical mass" of women present in the law-making

institutions changed patterns of political participation and the nature of legislative formulation by inclusion of women's opinion and voice. Successful efforts were made to improve the law to positively affect women's status and protection in Pakistani society (PILDAT, 2004).

Women role in Pakistan parliament remained vital for country's prosperity. But, according to National Election Commission report (2018), 183 women candidates submitted their files for member of national assembly in general election 2018 and only 8 candidates were successful across the country. It indicates women representation and participation that only 8 women remained successful among total 272 seats (ECP, 2018).

In general election 2013, quota for women in National Assembly and senate was around 17 percent of 342. Only six women were elected on general seats of NA form all over the Pakistan (ECP, 2013). From 2008 to 2012, women again occupied 17% reserved seats in the senate (Senate of Pakistan 2013), but 22% (i.e. 76 seats) in the national assembly. Similar to the situation in the Senate and National Assembly, women's membership in four Provincial Assemblies also increased (ECP, 2008).

In 2008 general election 53 women were candidate for national assembly in 60 constituencies; it was appreciable figure (Election Commission of Pakistan Report , 2008). Women political inclusion and empowerment in Pakistan is witnessed before independence. Muslim women took practical part in politics and also stood side by side with their men. After independence this participation was low during first two constituent assemblies, but with the passage of time it was improved and women remained Prime Minister, Speaker of Assemblies, and Ministers and also politically present in Provincial and National Assemblies. Women political inclusion and important part in legislation depends on so many factors including education, domestic and societal support, exposure, and most important self-motivation. More and more women presentation in parliament and legislative bodies also improves women socio-political conditions in society (ECP, Election Commission of Pakistan Report , 2008).

According Alexander 2016, to still there is lack of a standard or broadly accepted theory on women political empowerment. There are different guiding approaches and cross-sectional studies which may provide a direction to researcher to adopt or deny these approaches as per context for the research study (Alexander, 2016).

There is an inordinate amount of literature on the subject and there are multiple approaches ranges according to region, geographical importance, religion, values, and tradeoffs. These approaches are also inconsistency as changing scenario globally affecting all fields of life. With evolving technology, the indicators of empowerment have been changed.

According to (BECKWITH, 2003) women social and political movement proved a grass root level arrangement for their socio-political empowerment. In 19th century it was evolved with the concept of gender specific clubs, which proved effective to discuss specific issues, barriers and solutions were shared at that platform. The idea was to provide women enough liberty to meet with same gender and do whatever they may for their betterment. This small arrangement set a ground to polish women's socio-political skills and exposure (Alexander, Defining Women's Global Political Empowerment: Theories and Evidence, 2016)

Women political empowerment is not a generalized term; it is multidimensional concept and defined as the voices, resources and rights (Group, 2014). By (Kabeer, 2005) women empowerment has dimensions including resources, agency and achievements.

Women empowerment and women political empowerment are not new concept; these concepts are emerged in every society, region, and religion. After consulting multiple literatures, we came to know that there are four major dimensions to gauge women

empowerment over different eras and in almost all the world. These are Women Socio-economic Development, Women Economic Development, and adoption in culture, Women Social and Political Empowerment and Empowerment of multiple factors that influence women empowerment (Alexander, Empowering Women:, 2012).

Feminist theory was base for distinguishing male and female in society, and it left impact on all classes, all structures and disciplines of society while challenging traditional and conventional values in the society. Feminism was introduced almost 200 years ago, which indicate it is not an overnight change. This slow change left long-lasting changes on societies and countries. It was evolved in three waves. First wave dealt with suffrage that was related to right to vote to participate in political system, second wave was based on equal access for resources by both genders and third wave has broader magnitude to focus on global equality (Arinder, 2020)

Feminist theory is not a single standardize theory for all the countries and all the schools of thought. These theories address the traditional theories to change with current dilemma and women diversity around the globe. Liberal Feminists believe that women must have deep roots in and able to abide by social, political and legal constraints. Global Feminists focus to mainstream of women around the world.

Globally, women's participation in the political process is mainly emphasized because women make up half of the world's population (Shah, 2015). According to international standards, 33% of women should be represented in parliament, but their representation in parliament is 22% worldwide (Samman, 2016). Representation of women at all levels of government is endorsed for the growth and expansion of democracy (Tabassum, 2016). Democracy is strengthened and society is liberalized with the participation of women in the political process, such as elections and decision making. Asiyati Chiweza argues “it opens up avenues for women to articulate their interests, to enter arenas of political decision-making, and to advance women interests” (Inge Amundsen, 2016).

The consequences of insufficient representation of women in politics and legislation level derail the democratic configuration and the resulting deficit is harmful and dangerous. Furthermore, women representation warrants gender balance and socio-political development. If the democratic structure at the local level is monopolized by men, then women are hindered in both the law making and democratic process (FAFEN, 2018).

Despite these odds, Women lawmakers have performed well in terms of law making and attendance than their male counterparts. For example, in the lower house of parliament women lawmakers attended 50% sittings while men attended 42% meetings of the national assembly (FAFEN, 2018).

Father of the Nation, Muhammad Ali Jinnah once said, “No nation can rise to the height of glory unless your women are side by side with you” (Repila, 2013). It essentially suggests that if women are not represented in parliament, men are unlikely to address their concerns. Moreover, the Political processes in Pakistan both at national and local levels are dominated by political elites. Women who have been part of the political process belong to a feudal family and or a privileged class. Others who have no political ties or feudal background face serious impediments that affect their political, social and economic rights and their participation in political process. This is the case in South Punjab where women's participation in the political process is scarce. General Pervez Musharraf administration reserved a gigantic 33% of seats for women as part of the devolution of power plan, but in the 2013 Punjab Local Bodies Act the numbers of seats reserved for women were reduced to 15% (PUNJAB LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS ASSESSMENT, 2016).

Constitutional provisions regarding woman rights:

- Article 3 calls upon the State to eliminate all forms of exploitation.
- Article 4 provides for the right of individual to enjoy the protection of law and to be treated in accordance with the law. This applies to the citizens as well as “to every other person for the time being within Pakistan” without distinction. This article also clearly states that certain rights cannot be suspended.
- Article 32 makes special provisions for the representation of women in local Government.
- Article 34 directs the state to take appropriate measures to enable women to participate in all spheres of life and social activities.
- Articles 51 & 106 provide for the reservation of seats for women in the legislatures (GoP).

Government of the Punjab, Pakistan believes to eliminate gender discrimination and basic human rights exploitation. It motivates and aware women on women rights establish institutes and cell for women protection and put efforts on implementation of women protection laws. It also work to strengthen existing legal frameworks, removing gender based violence, and en-lined national level and global human rights with provincial level arrangements (Punjab, 2018).

Research Methodology

This research based on qualitative and descriptive approach. However, in this study deeply analyses the parliamentary debates and this debate collected from archives.

The following tools are used for the gathering of data.

Primary Data

Primary data is collected through:

1. Parliament debates from National Assembly archives
2. Constitution approved by parliament
3. FAFEN, Aurat Foundation and UN reports.

Secondary Data

Secondary data sources of the research following.

- a. Books
- b. Journals
- c. Different organizations and institutions where women are working
- d. Published reports and theses
- e. Different websites.
- f. Different news papers

Significance of Research:

It has been 75 years since independence of Pakistan, but women in politics are still marginalized. Women social and political empowerment was not taken serious since independence that's major reason women left behind in many fields of life. In General Pervez Musharraf tenure there was significant development to empower in parliament by increasing quota for women. There is need to understand the opportunities available to women parliamentarians, and what challenges they have to face.

Hypothesis:

Women social and political empowerment positively linked with women active participation in parliament.

Research questions:

Q.No.1 what are the problem and impediments for women parliamentarian in National Assembly.

Q.No.2 what are the potential solution to the women parliamentarian for enable participation in parliament.

Problem Statement:

Women share equal population in Pakistan but kept vulnerable in political activities in modern world. In all developed countries there is contribution of men and women, developing and underdeveloped countries don't provide equal empowerment to women that's is one of the basic reason they left behind in the world. Developed countries support legislation for women empowerment and ensure implementation of policies and facilitate departments for implementation of plans. Women were not empowered politically in all democratic government tenure but got maximum quota to represent in parliament in era of a dictator General Pervez Musharraf. But, women parliamentarian are still not empowered in parliament fro decision making and for legislation. Central objective of this study is to know challenges faced by women parliamentarian, opportunities they have and suggestions to improve women socio political empowerment through parliamentarian.

Conclusion:

In Pakistan's society there have many intrinsic and extrinsic factors including feudalism, social and economic injustice, norms and beliefs, education, chances of exposure and liberty in decision making. Since 2000 women representation in parliament has been increased due to allocated increased quota but their participation and representation is weak. Parliament is a central platform to discuss all national common issues, find out solutions of problems and law making to solve identified issues. But point to ponder is that only representation is not enough there must be enough empowerment to take part in decision making on equal bases and take part in legislation without any fear. Women empowerment is only possible with true spirit when women will be empowered on grass root level within political party and in society as well. Constitution of Pakistan ensures basic human rights and right to take part in social and political activities without any discrimination and fear but women look towards men to allow these rights.

Pakistan social and political system has dominance of men in almost all the fields of life. Political parties must have women equal participation at all the levels in mandate and ensure their role in all leading and decision making committees. There should be adherence of UN rights given to women to meet sustainable development of the country. Political parties must ensure democratic values by providing equal chances to participate and represent in social and political activities. There is need to change in mindset and approach for implementation of laws made for women protection and women development, this is only possible when all the social and political groups will ensure women empowerment at all the levels.

Anne Phillips (London School of Economics) is professor of political science states that women politician who represent in parliament are best equipped to understand and present women genuine issues and their common solutions that will lead to women empowerment in the country. Women politician must discuss and understand women common issues discuss their optimal solutions and present in parliament for legislation and policy making.

Suggestions:

Empowering women parliamentarians is crucial for achieving gender equality and better governance. Here are some suggestions on how to empower women in parliamentary roles:

Equal Representation: Ensure that women have equal representation in parliament. Implementing quotas or reserved seats for women can help bridge the gender gap and provide more opportunities for women to participate in decision-making.

Education and Training: Provide comprehensive training programs for women interested in politics and parliamentary roles. These programs should cover areas such as public speaking, leadership skills, policy analysis, and parliamentary procedures.

Mentorship and Networking: Establish mentorship programs that connect experienced women parliamentarians with newcomers. Networking opportunities can help women build relationships, gain support, and access resources that can enhance their effectiveness.

Supportive Work Environment: Create a work environment that is inclusive, free from discrimination, and supportive of work-life balance. Implement family-friendly policies such as parental leave and flexible working hours.

Capacity Building: Offer opportunities for skill development and capacity-building workshops. This could include workshops on negotiation, conflict resolution, and strategic planning to enhance the effectiveness of women parliamentarians.

Advocacy and Awareness: Raise awareness about the importance of women's participation in politics and the impact of their voices on policy-making. Engage in advocacy efforts to address societal biases and promote gender equality.

Access to Resources: Ensure that women parliamentarians have access to necessary resources, including research facilities, staff support, and funding for their initiatives.

Amplify Women's Voices: Encourage women to actively participate in debates, discussions, and committee work. Promote platforms where women can voice their concerns and ideas.

Gender-Responsive Policies: Advocate for and develop policies that address gender-specific issues, such as women's health, education, economic empowerment, and gender-based violence.

Recognition and Visibility: Recognize the contributions of women parliamentarians through awards and public acknowledgments. Increased visibility can inspire more women to enter politics.

Engage Men as Allies: Encourage male parliamentarians and leaders to actively support gender equality efforts. Men can play a significant role in advocating for women's rights and breaking down gender stereotypes.

Regular Evaluation: Regularly assess the progress of gender empowerment initiatives and make necessary adjustments based on the feedback and outcomes observed.

Collaboration with Civil Society: Partner with civil society organizations, women's groups, and NGOs that focus on women's empowerment. These partnerships can provide additional support and resources.

Media Engagement: Work with media to promote positive narratives around women in politics, highlighting their achievements and contributions rather than focusing solely on their appearance or personal lives.

Long-Term Commitment: Empowerment efforts should be sustained over the long term, with a commitment to creating a culture of gender equality in politics and society

Bibliography

- Alvi, A. S., Atta, A., & Sajanka, A. H. (2022). WOMEN'S POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT IN SOUTH ASIA: A STUDY OF PAKISTAN. *Harf-o-Sukhan*, 6(1.), 1-11.
- Alexander, A. C. (2012). Change in women's descriptive representation and the belief in women's ability to govern: A virtuous cycle. *Politics & Gender*, 8(4), 437-464.
- Alexander, A. C. (2016). Defining Women's Global Political Empowerment: Theories and Evidence. *Sociology Compass*, 432-441.
- Alexander, A. C. (2016). Defining Women's Global Political Empowerment: Theories and Evidence. *Wiley Online Library*.

- Arinder, J. A. (2020). Feminist Theory. *THEORETICAL MODELS FOR TEACHING AND RESEARCH*.
- Assembly, U. (2007, March 07). UNDERREPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN DECISION-MAKING A 'DEMOCRATIC DEFICIT', DELEGATE SAYS AS GENERAL ASSEMBLY CONTINUES THEMATIC DEBATE.
- BECKWITH, K. (2003). Beyond compare? Women's movements in comparative perspective. *European Journal of Political Research*, 431-468.
- Census, P. (2017). *Election Commission of Pakistan*.
- Data, G. (2021, August). *Global Data on National Parliamentarian*. Retrieved from <https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking?month=7&year=2021>: <https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking?month=7&year=2021>
- ECP. (2008).
- ECP. (2008). *Election Commission of Pakistan Report* .
- ECP. (2008). *Election Commission of Pakistan Report* . Islamabad : Election Commission of Pakistan.
- ECP. (2013).
- ECP. (2018). *Annual Report 2018*. ECP.
- FAFEN. (2018). Free and Fair Network Report.
- GoP, W. (n.d.). *Women Development Department, Govt. of the Punjab*. Retrieved from https://wdd.punjab.gov.pk/women_rights
- Group, W. B. (2014). *Voice Agency, Empowering women and girls for shared prosperity*. World Bank Group.
- Inge Amundsen, H. K. (2016). Women in Politics in Malawi. *Research Gate*.
- Kabeer, N. (2005). Gender equality and women's empowerment: a critical analysis of the third Millennium Development Goal. *Gender anti Development*.
- Mlamb, C. (2019). Factors influencing women political participation: The case of the SADC region. *Cogent Social Sciences*.
- PILDAT. (2004). *Women Representation in Pakistan's Parliament*. Lahore: USAID.
- Punjab, G. o. (2018). *Women Development Department*. Retrieved from https://wdd.punjab.gov.pk/women_rights
- (2016). *PUNJAB LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS ASSESSMENT*. Democracy Reporting International.
- Repila, J. (2013). The politics of our lives : the Raising Her Voice in Pakistan experience. In *The politics of our lives : the Raising Her Voice in Pakistan experience*. Islamabad: Aurat Foundation.
- Reyes, S. L. (2002). *Quotas for Women for Legislative Seats at the Local Level in Pakistan*. International IDEA, 2002, Women in Parliament.
- Samman, A. H. (2016). *Women's economic empowerment Navigating enablers and constraints*.
- Shah, I. A. (2015). Women councilors for women's empowerment in Pakistan. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 203-219.
- Tabassum, D. N. (2016). Women in Pakistan: Status in Socio-cultural and Politico-legal Domains. *Higher Education Commission Pakistan*.
- United Nation, S. (n.d.).
- Women, U. (2021). *Women and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*. UN Womwn.