

## CAUSES OF MEAGER PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS IN KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA ASSEMBLY; AND THE WAY OUT

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### Abstract

*This paper aims to explore the causes of meager participation of women in Khyber Pakhtukhwa (KP) assembly. The study was conducted on the obstacle that was faced by these women parliamentarians in the KP assembly during the last three governments (2002-2008, 2008-2013, and 2013-2018) in the light of expert opinion of female political representatives, political activists and experts. Women as a constituent candidate, their role in the parliament and the problems they faced have been discussed. The paper is based on qualitative method. Total 20 MPAs, MNAs, and female rights activists were interviewed for qualitative analysis. The interviews were unstructured, allowing flexibility, liberty of conversation and flow of information. It was found that there are still many difficulties faced by these women parliamentarian in the KP assembly. The study concludes that ideological, economic and patriarchal mind-set are the main factors that hinders women participation in the assembly's business. The findings of the study can be used effectively to increase women participation by bringing awareness at local level and making appropriate policies at national level.*

**Keywords:** Women, Politics, Women Participation, Provincial government, Quota, Caucus.

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## Introduction

Politics is the most important organ of the state that regulates and enforces the law for the peace and prosperity of the society. Women comprise about half of the world's population, but they are not actively involved in politics. Politics include the process of decision making and power of an individual. Despite the tremendous progress and softening of the rigid stance and attitude of the society toward women's participation in politics, women in legislature and at other levels of politically active engagements are still facing manifold challenges and problems.<sup>1</sup>

Discourses' regarding women suffrage rights in an Islamic country, like Pakistan, necessitates its discussion within its social, cultural, religious and political frameworks.<sup>2</sup> According to the 2017 census, women population is almost equal to male population of Pakistan, but gender discrimination is rampant everywhere in the country despite the lofty claims of gender equality. The constitution of Pakistan has assured equal political participation of women, as the Article 25 of the 1973 Constitution states, "All citizens are equal before the law and are entitled to enjoy equal protection before the law. There shall be no gender discrimination".<sup>3</sup> In the same way, the Constitution has fully enunciated the role of women in the Local Government institution in these words, "local Government institutions composed of elected representatives of the areas concerned and in such institutions special representation will be given to peasants, workers and women".<sup>4</sup> More emphasis has been given on the women participation "Steps shall be taken to ensure full participation of women in all spheres of national life".<sup>5</sup>

There are some potent long-term factors, ingrained in the very fabric of Pakistani society which is not helpful for the development of pro-women political behavior. Besides other invisible issue, financial, socio-cultural, political and ideological issues are the most obvious ones.<sup>6</sup> Keeping in consideration the numerical strength of women, it is cheerless that because of social cum cultural components women confront hardship at the local, district, provincial and national level, these are not proportionate with their numbers. It is a common phenomenon in Pakistan that women with relatively stronger and deeper family background in politics have greater

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<sup>1</sup>Barbara Rogers, *The domestication of women: Discrimination in developing societies*. (Routledge, 2005).

<sup>2</sup>Asma Afzal Shami, "Political empowerment of women in Pakistan." *Pakistan Vision* 10, no. 1 (2009): 141-150.

<sup>3</sup>Article 25 of the 1973 Constitution of Pakistan.

<sup>4</sup>Article 32 of the 1973 Constitution of Pakistan.

<sup>5</sup>Article 34 of the 1973 Constitution of Pakistan.

<sup>6</sup>Farzana Bari, "Women's political participation: Issues and Challenges." In *United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women Expert Group Meeting: Enhancing Participation of Women in Development through an Enabling Environment for Achieving Gender Equality and the Advancement of Women*. Bangkok. 2005.

chances of success in politics as a profession. For example, Miss Fatima Jinnah was the sister of the founder of Pakistan; Benazir Bhutto, the daughter of Z.A. Bhutto; and Maryam Nawaz Sharif, daughter of the then Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.<sup>7</sup>

The conditions of Pakistani women concerning their political participation have relatively improved in the present day Pakistani society. Be that as it may, genuine political development of women is still an ideal that has not been materialized yet.<sup>8</sup> Quota system of fixed seats has removed the fear of male dominance as in open competition chances are low for women victory. Mandate always fall short for women candidates in open, free competition. Turner (2003) has thoroughly analyzed the electoral politics of neighboring countries, Bangladesh, India and far eastern country Indonesia; in this regard he has discussed the quota allocation of these countries. According to Turner quota seats introduced new faces to the politics. He has greatly emphasized on quota and to him at least 30 percent quota is a must in every parliament.<sup>9</sup>

Gen. Musharraf tried to improve the women's political participation as his attitude was enlightened and pro-women. He expanded the strength of women seats to the transcending 60 in the NA and proportionately in the Provincial Assemblies. Commendably, he did not fix any date for the expiry of this number and he tried to accomplish the gender equality in his time.<sup>10</sup>

The whole of Pakistan, but especially the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, remained under the influence of ideological and political elements during 2010 elections that constrained women from political participation and casting vote. As a result, women empowerment was given a set back and deprivation of women was bound to follow. It stretches a clear practicing picture of patriarchal system in this modern era.<sup>11</sup> Patriarchy can be witnessed everywhere in the Pakhtun belt and it is man who determines the course and destiny of the family. Patriarchy is a familial, social, ideological and political system through which men subjugates

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<sup>7</sup>Shami, "Political empowerment of women in Pakistan."

<sup>8</sup> SairaBano, "Women in parliament in Pakistan: Problems and potential solutions." *Women's Studies Journal* 23, no. 1 (2009): 19.

<sup>9</sup> BarryTurner, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA). *The Statesman's Yearbook 2003: The Politics, Cultures and Economies of the World 2004*, 116-117.

<sup>10</sup>TahirMehdi, "Women in politics." *Daily Dawn*, 2015.May 25: 07.

<sup>11</sup>Navid Iqbal Khan, "Tehreek-i-Nifaz-i-Shariat-i-Muhammadi in Malakand Division (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa): A Case Study of the Process of "State Inversion"." *Pakistan Journal of History and Culture* 31, no. 1 (2010): 131-158.

women in every conceivable way such as direct pressure, rituals and norms, law, division of labor and education.<sup>12</sup>

Pakhtunwali (Pakhtun Code of life) is the real ideology of every Pakhtun since eons even after they embraced Islam. Women were considered out of the ambit of public activities and enterprises. Taken as the embodiment of all social evils, Pakhtun culture is hesitant to give women any freedom of movement leaving aside political participation. It is held against the valor and dignity of man if women undertake any public enterprise and activity.<sup>13</sup>

A study states that the number of the members of provincial assembly of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was 124. Out of which 17% (22 seats) are reserved for women. Similarly, the general and women specific seats are allocated independently to each province, former FATA and ICT (Islamabad Capital Territory) in the lower house (National Assembly) of Pakistan. Currently the strength of the members of the lower house of Pakistan is 342. The allocation of women reserved seats is with end goal that 35 seats are reserved for Punjab, 14 seats for Sindh, 3 seats for Baluchistan and 8 seats for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province respectively.<sup>14</sup> The allocation of insufficient seats for women, the rigging and manipulation and insecurity concerns have greatly reduced women active participation. There have never been elaborate arrangements for women training programs and awareness raising sessions nor any political education about the political party manifestoes and historical background.<sup>15</sup>

Usually the political parties of Pakistan shun of issuing tickets to female on open seats. This indicates a dominant inclination on the part of male to keep women out of public offices.<sup>16</sup> Insufficient seats for women, the rigging, manipulation and security concerns have greatly reduced women's active participation. There has never been an elaborate arrangement for women training programs and awareness raising sessions nor any political education about the political party manifestoes and historical background.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Hester Eisenstein, *Contemporary feminist thought* (Twayne Publishers, 1984).

<sup>13</sup> ArabNaz, and Chaudhry, Hafeez-ur-Rehamn, *Gender and Development: Socio-Cultural, Economic, Religious and Political Impediments in Women's Empowerment and Gender Development: A Case Study of Malakand Division KPK Pakistan* (2011). BIOINFO Sociology, Volume 1, Issue 1, 2011, pp. 15-24. Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2083016>

<sup>14</sup> CIDOB. "*Political system and State system of Pakistan*. Barcelona": International yearbook. (2012).

<sup>15</sup> Rakhshanda Naz, 2013. "Political participation: 20% of assembly seats demanded for women." *The Express Tribune*, January 02: 1.

<sup>16</sup> Saleem "Women's political participation". *Daily Times*, August. (2013) 13: 04.

<sup>17</sup> ArabNaz, and Waqar Ahmad. "Socio-cultural impediments to women political empowerment in Pakhtun society." *Academic Research International* 3, no. 1 (2012): 163.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The main objective of this research paper is to find out the main reasons behind meager participation of women in the KP assembly as well as to find out the way out to increase their participation.

### **Research Method**

This topic needs more detail and in-depth study to know the issues and challenges faced by women parliamentarian of KP assembly. Therefore, the researcher used qualitative method to investigate the causes of women meager participation. In order to make this research more realistic and cosmopolitans, the participants were selected on the basis of different characteristics, experiences and opinions, which were of direct interest. Thus totally 20 MPAs, MNAs, and female rights activists were interviewed for qualitative analysis. This study was conducted on the obstacles that these female parliamentarians faced in the working of the parliament in the last three governments (2002, 2008, and 2013) in the light of expert opinion of female political representatives, political activists and experts' opinion. In the given discussion women as a constituent candidate and the problems they faced in the working of the assembly has been discussed. The interviews were unstructured allowing flexibility, liberty of conversation and flow of information.

### **Analysis and Interpretation**

The women interviewed ranged from 26-56 years of age, having different social background. Majority of the respondents were of political background. A few of them belonged to middle class. All of the respondents were familiar with the legislative and policy making process. En of the respondents were provincial assembly members between 2002-2013 and 2013-2018 while one was the member of National Assembly and the rest were political activists and NGOs heads. The interviews were based on the following point:

➤ The causes of meager participation of women in KP assembly, and way out to insure maximum female participation in the assembly business. Majority of the respondents were satisfied and greatly welcomed the entry of women in the parliament on reserved seats. The quota system for women in central legislature (NA and Senate) and in all the Provincial Assemblies of Pakistan was very encouraging. Most of the respondents were very much critical about the role of women of the 12<sup>th</sup> Parliament. According to an interviewee:

*“Although the 12<sup>th</sup> Parliament witnessed enough number of women parliamentarians, but ironically, most of the elected women*

*parliamentarians have never been tried either, and their role in this connection was not different from men”.*<sup>18</sup>

While discussing the positive aspects of women reserved seats an MP opined:

*“The most positive aspect of the 2002 general elections is observed nationally and internationally that as the results of these elections the myth that women are either not ready or unwilling to come to mainstream politics or not yet able to shoulder the responsibilities of electoral politics at constituency, provincial or national level is dismantled”.*<sup>19</sup>

When these respondents were asked about their performance, they answered that in province like KP, where men enjoy power of decision making in the assembly and still a patriarchal set up is there. It stalls the performance of women parliamentarians in the KP Assembly. This assembly had 22 women parliamentarians. These female brought many issue and debates to the assembly floor as compared to their male members. Out of 109 private members bills 72 were presented by female MPAs of KP assembly. In KP Assembly out of 208 resolutions 113 (59.4%) were introduced by women MPAs. Out of 11,056 questions raised on the working of the Executive Branch of the government 7,138 questions were raised by women MPAs.

One of the respondents said about the caucus role:

*“Women parliamentary caucus was formed with the aim to ensure that gender concern is adequately translated into legislation, policies and programs”.*<sup>20</sup>

12<sup>th</sup> Parliament of Pakistan was the first Parliament which warmly welcomed the entry of women in the parliament on quota, but this process was not sufficient for active women political participation. Most of the respondents from NGOs critically evaluated that:

*“These parliamentarians remained silent at the Assembly floor on raising women’s issues pertaining to women’s empowerment. Since 2002, the Parliament witnessed enough number of women parliamentarians, but they too remained silent, like their counterparts on women issues”.*<sup>21</sup>

The then President of Pakistan General Pervaiz Musharraf, not only raised the strength of women quota in the NA, Senate, PAs, but also fixed

<sup>18</sup>Khursheed Bano, interview by author, April 3, 2018

<sup>19</sup>RakhshandaNaz, interview by author, April 5, 2018.

<sup>20</sup>ShawanaSha, interview by author, April 10, 2018.

<sup>21</sup>KhursheedBano, interview by author, April 13, 2018.

33% reserved seats for local government councils in all tiers. But unfortunately, these female could not perform their role as women legislators to highlight their sisterhood issues instead they were very much satisfied with the existing quota mechanism.

Although women are always undervalued, but they proved their political skills at the assembly floor, by remaining more active, more confident and more useful. They not only vigorously took part in the work of the legislature but also draw the attention of the house towards many issues by putting forward different bills. In fact they brought more business to the house as compared to their male MPAs.

Majority of the respondents were of the opinion that most of the decision are made outside the parliament (hujra, jumat or hotels). Women were not given any kind of authority to make decisions. Reserved seats are given to the female just for fill in the blanks. The respondents agreed that patriarchal nature of the assemblies (male dominated) is a great reason for low political participation. Only 8% women intervened and expressed their opinion in the parliament during 2010-2011, which was very nominal. The reason is that they don't have awareness and capacity building. They all agreed upon the statement:

*“In our assemblies, men dominate the political arena, men formulate the rule of the politics and for evaluation they define the standard. Women always follow their respective party's direction. So, the greatest challenge to women participation is its patriarchal nature”.*<sup>22</sup>

Women legislators can talk on female issues, they cannot highlight general issues. These women are excluded from budget and decision making process. They said that financial and political status also influence female participation. These indirectly elected women are considered less important as compared to the popularly elected members of the assembly. In the words of an activist:

*“The two-major obstacle for a woman to enter parliament are lack of constituency and lack of financial resources. They have no base from which to develop social contacts with the people or to build knowledge and experience about politics. Furthermore, they have no financial independence. This lack of constituency*

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<sup>22</sup>NaseemHayat, interview by author, (March 19,2018)

*and financial dependence pose serious hurdle to their participation”.*<sup>23</sup>

Another respondent said:

*“Every women politician, even if they are elected against reserved seats must have their own constituencies. There is no power without people power”.*<sup>24</sup>

It was said that the influential political families are given preference and those female party workers and party loyal are ignored who work day and night for their parties. As stated by a parliamentarian:

*“The greatest challenge for these female parliamentarians is the lack of unity. Majority of the members are male and they dominate the scenario. While women MPs do what their parties want them to do. In contradictory issues, they give priority to their party decisions. There are very few times when they joined the caucus activities since they are pre- occupied with their parties’ agendas”.*<sup>25</sup>

## **Findings**

In a nutshell, politics in Pakistan has remained always obstacle to women political participation for being a multifaceted, notorious, disturbing, aggressive and reactionary.

The findings of this study are based on Data Analysis. The topic where the researcher wanted to pursue the opinion of the respondents were their views about the hindrance in female participation in the assembly at provincial and national level. All these aspects collectively measured the respondents’ perceptions about female participation. Following are the findings that emerged in the current study regarding female participation in legislature.

## **Mechanism of Political Parties**

The mechanism of political parties and its environment do not favor women to participate actively in politics. As per the findings of this study, the respondents strongly agreed that the structures of the political parties and its poor mechanism discourage women’s active involvement in politics. The political parties of Pakistan have no definite policies for women; rather these delegate them and use them merely as supporters.

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<sup>23</sup>Saajida ZulfiqarKhan,interview by author,(March 21, 2018)

<sup>24</sup>Shabina, interview interview by author, (March 27, 2018)

<sup>25</sup>Miraj Humayun, interview by author, (March 19, 2018)

### **Socio-Economic Pattern**

The two major obstacles for women to participate in legislative process were the absence of power base that results from the constituency politics and financial powers necessary for the development of social contact building political skills and gaining experience. They have no base from which to develop social contacts with the people or to build knowledge and experience about politics. They have no financial independence.

### **Socio-Cultural Pattern**

A very important point that was highlighted, was that socio-cultural pattern effects women participation. Majority of the respondents strongly agreed that family responsibilities affect women's participation in politics.

### **Dominant Patriarchy System**

According to respondents in KP provincial assembly, men enjoy power of decision making in the assembly and still dominant patriarchal set up do exist there. They agreed that men are powerful and decision maker in assemblies as well as in political parties and curtailing women's political progress.

### **Less Number Of Women Representations In The Parliament**

The respondents were not satisfied with the insufficient number of women's representation in legislature. Majority of the respondents were of the opinion that women should not restrict themselves to domestic spheres. The representation of women is not sufficient according to their strength.

### **Peshawar-Based Women Parliamentarians & Political Leadership**

According to an activist from Peshawar, the parliamentary performance of women parliamentarians in 2002-2007 government was much deplorable in the National Assembly. Instead of focusing on their task and to highlight them on the Assembly floor they were satisfied with the existing quota system for women and their strength in the legislative assemblies.

Women politicians and party workers are being ignored and instead influential leaders are rewarded for their contribution in party by nominating their female relatives who happen to be the mediocre. They show their concern about their male counterparts that they discourage female representatives for taking any kind of initiatives.

### **Status of Parliamentary Caucus**

Majority of the respondents highlighted that caucus is weak forum of women representatives for the reason that it is voluntary organization; it has no constitutional status, is less in number, has funding issue, has ignorance and has party loyalties. The creation of caucus was wished by majority of MP. Yet after its creation, most of the MPs seemed circumspect towards its usefulness and many said that they had little interest in actively participating in the caucus.

### **Gender Discrimination within Politics**

This study concludes that some very serious hurdles created to the female leadership were; gender inequality at social level; limited chance of women electability, lack of political skill and lack of necessary skills to build political alliances. Political parties feel often reluctant to nominate women to run for the election as well as to engage them in decision making processes. This mindset in political parties discourages political workers and thus slows down their upward political mobility.

### **Lack of Awareness and Political Skills**

Female parliamentarians didn't know the ABC of legislative process. Majority of them are uneducated or unaware of their role. They are never appreciated on general seats. Political parties give general seats to men because of socio-cultural restrains of our society. The respondents were of the view that the low education rate of women parliamentarians in Peshawar affects women's participation in politics.

### **Conclusion**

This study concludes that factors responsible for meager participation of women include restricted mobility, weak decision-making power, lack of political skills, meager financial resources family responsibilities and cultural as well as religious "norms" and practices. Generally in Pakistan, and particularly in Pakhtun society, women are influenced by norms and cultural values. In this regard, this research study primarily explored the extent of women political participation in provincial assembly of KP, and Pakistan. Pakhtun socio cultural setup is deeply influenced by male dominant patriarchal structure. The data reveals that illiteracy, gender sensitivity, lack of political skill, defective electoral laws, financial dependency, socio-economic and socio-cultural patterns of Pakhtun society, absence of conducive atmosphere at the legislative level are the main causes that hinders women participation in politics.

### **Future Direction**

To accelerate women's effective political participation in state affairs, education, political awareness and socio-economic development are

the main determinants of women active engagements in politics. Training and awareness programs regarding women empowerment within politics should be arranged at local and union council level. In order to minimize the patriarchal perception at national level, budget allocation is needed for health, education, and also for politics, family and economic initiatives.

The political parties' manifestoes should be more pro-women. It should be made mandatory for political parties to give at least one third of party ticket to its female workers on general seats. Mandatory provisions shall be made in the selection criteria on reserved seats to keep balance in the ratio of women as party-workers and political-elites. To encourage more female candidates in political participation nomination of fees for women candidates should be reduced. Party support, activism, education and internal democratic environment of political parties in KP are the source of increasing women's political participation. Civic Societies should focus on the elimination of patriarchal setup by realizing women of their strength the government should made it mandatory through a law to be enacted that lay down penalties for parties if that fail to observe the 1/3 requirement within their candidates nominated by a party to contest political seats. The ruling party should give developmental funds to their female members to develop their own constituencies and at same they should be given adequate share in the key post and ministries. To encourage more women participation in legislature the issues, less number, funds issue, ignorance and party loyalties needs reforms. Women Caucus needs statutory status to increase its effectiveness in resolving gender issues.

Political Parties should keep into account the socio-cultural order, the ideological and historical background of the state to make this participation effective. In such state of affairs, women parliamentarians and political activists have to take two fold responsibilities, firstly, they need to make sure the women political empowerment as much as possible; second, if no growth is added to the existing conditions, they must maintain the status quo and do not allow back pedaling in the already assured achievements for women participation.

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