

## **LADIES UNION COUNCILLORS AND DECISION MAKING: A NIGHTMARE**

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### **Abstract:**

*The foundation of Pakistan has been laid down on Islamic ideology. The founder of Pakistan, Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, emphasized on women participation in every field of life. He was staunch supporter of women participation in national politics. In the post independence Pakistan, women were granted share in both national and local politics. However, their position remained dependent. In Local Government System, 2001 the 33% seats were reserved for women at district, tehsil/town and union council levels. The irony is that they had no such role to play in the decision making and ultimately in the social development of the society.*

### **Introduction:**

The military regime of Pervaiz Musharraf introduced local government system under the cover of Devolution of Power Plan. Under that system City District Government of Peshawar consists of four towns (Town-I, Town-II, Town-III, and Town-IV) and ninety-two union councils. Town-I consist of 25 Union Councils, and is thus the largest town in City District Peshawar. Five union councils (Lahori, Gunj, Karim Pura, Yakka Toot-I and Sikandar Town) of Town-I under the jurisdiction of City District Government of Peshawar have been chosen for investigation.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See for details Amir Ullah Khan's M. Phil Thesis, "Financial Management of The Union Councils in Pakistan: The Case Study of Town-I, City District Government of Peshawar", Department of Political Science, University of Peshawar 2005-06. p. 2. Cited hereafter as Amir's M. Phil Thesis.

### **Constitutional Status of Women Participation:**

In the post independence period the constitution framers kept into consideration the importance of women in politics. Under 1956 Constitution of Pakistan, ten seats five from each wing of Pakistan for women were given in the National Assembly,<sup>2</sup> while in Provincial legislature, ten seats were reserved.<sup>3</sup> The 1962 Constitution of Pakistan also provided for six reserved seats for women, three from East and three from West Pakistan.<sup>4</sup>

Like the two previous abrogated constitutions, the original draft of 1973 Constitution of Pakistan also ensured 20 reserved seats for women in the National Assembly,<sup>5</sup> while in Provincial Assemblies five percent was reserved for women.<sup>6</sup> Under Pervaiz Musharaf's military regime reserved 33% seats and the total numbers seats were raised to of for women are sixty in the national assembly.<sup>7</sup> Under the same constitution, four seats have been reserved for women in Senate for each Province.<sup>8</sup>

It is noteworthy that besides these reserved seats the women are entitled to contest elections on general seats. The philosophy behind this reservation of seats and the increase in number of seats accordingly is to ensure the maximum participation of women in mainstream policy making of the state.

### **Women Participation and Local Government Institutions**

Local self-government promotes the sense of common interest in the people. George S. Blair says that "A sense of common interest in community affairs arises from the many opportunities for local service and participation, and it becomes a common duty of the citizens to see that their representatives perform efficiently and honestly."<sup>9</sup>

Keeping in view the importance of women role in socio-political life of a nation, under the Devolution of Power Plan, women participation has

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2 G. W. Choudhury, *Constitutional Development in Pakistan*, Lahore, Law Inn Publishers, 2005-06. P.152. See also Dr. Safdar Mahmood, *Constitutional Foundations of Pakistan*, Lahore, Jang Publishers. 1990. p. 257

3 Ibid. 267. Cited hereafter as Dr. Safdar Mahmood's *Constitutional Foundations of Pakistan*

4 Ibid. 248. See also Dr. Safdar Mahmood's *Constitutional Foundations of Pakistan*. p. 249

5 Dr. Safdar Mahmood's *Constitutional Foundations of Pakistan*. p. 861

6 Ibid. 893

7 *The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan 1973 As amended by the Constitution (Eighteenth Amdt.) Act, 2010 (Act No. X of 2010)*, P. 25. Cited hereafter as *The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan 1973*

8 *The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan 1973*. p. 31

9 George S. Blair, *Government At The Grass Roots*, [4<sup>th</sup> Ed], California (USA), Palisades Publishers, 1986. p. 5. Cited hereafter as Blair's *Government At The Grass Roots*.

been ensured in the local politics. Two general and two labour/peasants/workers seats have been reserved for women at union council level.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, thirty three percent (33 %) of the total number of union councils in Tehsil or Town have been reserved for women.<sup>11</sup> Besides this, thirty three percent (33 %) of the total number of union councils members in each district have been reserved for women.<sup>12</sup> Even in Village and Neighborhood council, one seat is for women.<sup>13</sup>

At union council, participation of the lady councillors in financial decisions or budgetary preparation is totally ignored. Furthermore, the union councillors elected in general seats in common and ladies councilors in specific have no idea of the union fund. Even they are unaware about the mechanism that how the funds are allocated for various developmental works. According to Yar Muhammad Advocate:

*“We have no participation in the budgetary session. Even we were never invited for discussing and passing the budget of the union council. However, we are satisfied with the attitude of our Nazim. So far taxes at the union council are concerned, as large portion of population are poor and they have attached expectations to us for some sort of relief. We, therefore, are not collecting fees on various items mentioned in the Ordinance.”<sup>14</sup>*

The basic political unit at UC level has failed to solve the problems of the people. The union councilors have no share in the union budget for the schemes put forward by them to UC. The councilors have no knowledge of union budget and fund.<sup>15</sup>

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10 Article 87 of NWFP Local Government (Amendment) Act, 2005. (Ordinance No. XIV of 2001), National Reconstruction Bureau, 2007. p. 55. Cited hereafter as NWFP Local Government (Amendment) Act, 2005

11 Article 65. Ibid. p. 42

12 Article 37. Ibid. p. 21

13 Article 94. Ibid. p. 60

14 An interview of author with Yar Muhammad, The General Councillor in Lahori Union Council dated Dec 2, 2008. See also Amir's M. Phil Thesis. p. 49

15 An Interview of the author with Mr. Zar Shad, a General Councillor of Qadir Abad, dated 3/12/2008. See also Amir's M. Phil Thesis. p.

**Table 1 Academic Background Ladies Union Councillors of the Selected Union Councils<sup>16</sup>**

Designation	U/C No: 20 Yakka Toot 1	Education	U/C No: Karim Pura	Education	U/C No: 9 Sikandar Town	Education	U/C No: 19 Gunj	Education	U/C No: 14 Lahori	Education
General Councillor	Zeenat Begum	Primary	Bibi Noorin	FA	Rehana Kamal	SSC	Shazia Shaheen	SSC	Shahzadi Bibi	SSC
General Councillor	Vacant	-----	Ghazala Gul	SSC	Mumtaz Sikandar	SSC	Shazia Naureen	SSC	Zeenat Malik	SSC
Labour Councillor	Zahida Bibi	Illiterate	Rehana Akhtar	Nil	Shaita Iqbal	Primary	Shagufta Yasmin	SSC	Samina Iqbal	Primary
Labour Councillor	Aali Mata	Illiterate	Nasir Parveen	Nil	Khatoon Begum	SSC	Umme Laila Zahid	SSC	Nusrat Bibi	SSC

### **Hindrances in the Way Active Role:**

There is no doubt that right to participation of women in state's affairs at both national and local have been ensured though various constitutional and statutory documents. However, in actual their role is not found up to the mark. This sorry state of affairs circles around the following basic reasons.

The poor education background of the ladies councillors hinders them to acquaint themselves the significance of local government institutions. The female union councillors elected to office are hardly found the holder of Secondary School certificate. It is, therefore, a herculean task to impart to them the significance of local bodies' institutions.<sup>17</sup>

The ladies union councilors are not playing as such active role in decision making as they need to play. It may be due our social-cultural structure of our society which is conservative in nature.<sup>18</sup> During field study it is also noted that on behest of lady union councillor, her spouse was performing duty.<sup>19</sup>

The constitution of Pakistan ensures the rule of law or in simple words the equality of citizens.<sup>20</sup> The constitution also discourages

<sup>16</sup> Amir's M. Phil Thesis. pp. 93-95

<sup>17</sup> An Interview of author with Mr. Tariq Aziz, Lahori UC Nazim dated 31/12/07. Cited hereafter an interview with Mr. Tariq Aziz.

<sup>18</sup> An interview with Mr. Tariq Aziz. Dated 31/12/07.

<sup>19</sup> It is based on author's personal observation. However, ethics & privacy does not allow the author to disclose her name.

<sup>20</sup>Article, 25A (1). *The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan 1973*. p. 15

discrimination on the basis of sex.<sup>21</sup> No doubt, the women have given the right to participate in the state's affairs<sup>22</sup> but the research study shows that women in the local government institutions have not been given the due share in the decision making process in letter & spirit.

The study of Local Government Ordinance, 2001 reveals no specification of role for female councilors. The undefined role of lady councilors at the grass roots level further keep away them to play an active role in the decision making and social development of the society. In the Local Government Ordinance, 2001, the role of each functionary is described. Article 80 of Local Government Ordinance, 2001 enumerates the functions of the Union Nazim. However, it is silent about the role of women at the grass roots level.<sup>23</sup>

During study the dictatorial role of the Union Council Nazim is observed. Most of the Nazimeen<sup>24</sup> with exception of few were not paying a heed of attention to local problems. The overall cleanliness condition of the area is miserable. The Nazim and Naib Nazim are not inspecting the area. They are not paying attention to their duty.<sup>25</sup> The union council administration is not concentrating on cleanliness of the area. The drainage and sanitation system in the area is also poor. It has no control over the prices of daily commodities used.<sup>26</sup>

They did not follow the Local Government Ordinance, 2001 in letters and spirits. They did not bother to consult their union councillors on various issues of public importance. Even budget's preparation and implementation was done without any notice of union councillors in general and female councillors in particular. The councillors have no knowledge of union budget and fund.<sup>27</sup>

The party affiliation further obstructs the female councillors to participate in the decision making at the grass roots level. In case the Nazim and ladies councillors belong to same political party then there was no need to participate as their agenda is same, if they belong to different political parties then the ladies councillors were reluctant to participate in the session of union councils.

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21 Article, 25A (2). *Ibid.* p. 15

22 Article, 34. *Ibid.* p. 18

23 NWFP Local Government (Amendment) Act, 2005. pp. 51-52

24 Mayors. Plural of Nazim

25 Interview of the author with Mr. Auranzeb, a resident of Qadir Abad, dated 3/12/2008. See also Amir's M. Phil Thesis. p. 70

26 Interview of the author with Prof. Mukhtar Ahmad, a resident of Fazal Abad, dated 3/12/2008.

27 An Interview with Mr. Zar Shad, a General Councillor of Qadir Abad, dated 3/12/2008. See also Amir's M. Phil Thesis. p. 70

**Table: 2 Showing Local Representatives' Party Affiliation in the Selected Union Councils<sup>28</sup>**

Designation	UC Lahori	UC Gunj	UC Karim Pura	UC Yakka Toot-1	UC Sikandar Town
Nazim	PPP	PPP	PPP	ANP	PPP
Naib Nazim	PPP	PPP	PML (N)	ANP	PPP
General Councillor (Male)	PPP	PPP	ANP	ANP	ANP
General Councillor (Male)	ANP	PML (N)	PPP	ANP	PPP
General Councillor (Male)	ANP	ANP	PPP	ANP	PPP
General Councillor (Male)	ANP	ANP	PPP	JUI (F)	PPP
Lady General Councillor	ANP	PPP	PPP	ANP	PPP
Lady General Councillor	ANP	PPP	ANP	Vacant	Independent
Labour Councillor (Male)	PPP	ANP	PPP	ANP	PPP
Labour Councillor (Male)	PPP	PPP	PPP	ANP	PPP
Lady Labour Councillor	ANP	PPP	ANP	ANP	PPP
Lady Labour Councillor	PPP	PPP	PPP	ANP	ANP
Minority	PPP	PPP	PPP	ANP	Vacant

It is crystal clear from Table 2 that except one local representative, the rest of them are belonging to one political party or the other.<sup>29</sup>

### **Recommendations:**

The aforementioned study shows that the poor performance of female councilors in life of society. They have no contribution in the social development. Their constitutional role needs to be eliminated from the active politics. But it would be insane decision if ever taken by somebody. Our society is in a transitional state. The people require political education. The unsatisfactory performance of female union councilors does not mean to keep them away from active politics or

<sup>28</sup> See for details Amir Ullah Khan, The Myth of Party-less Local Bodies Elections under LGO, 2001: A Case Study of Town-1, City District Government Peshawar. *Journal of Law and Society*, Vol: XXXVII. No. 52, Law College, University of Peshawar, July 2008. pp. 125-140

<sup>29</sup> See for details Amir Ullah Khan, The Enigma of Local Government Institutions in Pakistan. Submitted for Publication to *Journal of Pakistan Development Review*, Pakistan Institute of Development Economics, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad.

decision making processes at any level. Their presence and participation at each level is as important as that of a man. However, some reforms are needed to materialize this dream.

The literacy rate in Pakistan is not up to the mark. While for a successful democracy, education is a pre-requisite. Without education no one can think of a vibrant democracy. Local self-Government has an educative value. It acquaints the common people with the basics of politics. Harold J. Laski says, "The institution of local government is educative to, perhaps, a higher degree than any other part of the government."<sup>30</sup> It is, therefore, recommended that educated women need to be encouraged through electoral process at the grass roots level so as to train them for the hierarchy in politics and decision making.

Another suggestion is that proper training to women representatives should be given. Seminars, workshops, and conferences should be held to educate them about their due role to play at the grass roots level. Print media should be used for this purpose. The technicalities in the Local Government Ordinance should be highlighted to them.

In addition to this, women representatives should be encouraged to participate in financial/ budgetary processes. They should be educated about the whole process. George S. Blair while emphasizing the importance of local self-government he says:

*"The school of democracy concept is a virtual function of local government. Service in local government not only trains men and women to work for others but also to work with others since government at any level involves a large measure of compromise. Local service often serves as a springboard for careers in branches of state and national government."*<sup>31</sup>

Their roles should be defined so as to enable them dynamics about the of decision making process. This vague role hindered their way to play active role as was expected by the general public. Local government institutions are not only training centers for political growth but source of solution of their problems at their door steps.

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30 K. M. Bhatti, (Ed), *Local Government for Rural Development in Pakistan*, Peshawar, Pakistan Academy for Rural Development, 1990. p. 7. See also Amir's M. Phil Thesis. p. 11

31 Blair's *Government At The Grass Roots*. p. 5

## Conclusion

The significance of the role of women cannot be set aside. However, sincere efforts are needed to implement the local government laws in letters and spirits and rather to abolish women role once for all. To sum up the whole discussion with this saying of Austin Ranney that “local government is an invaluable socio-political laboratory for testing on a small scale various new proposals for government organization and social and economic policies. Local failure can be borne with far less social cost than that of the national government, and local successes can and often do serve as models that the national government can follow with minimum risk.”<sup>32</sup>

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32 Austin Ranney, *The Governing of Men*, Illinois, The Dryden Press, 1975. p. 474