

Gender Inequality and Role of Political Parties in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Gender equality is one of the most discussing social issues in international and national forums. Many of the states gives importance this issue while making their public policies. This study discusses political dimension of gender inequality prevailing in Pakistan. Pakistan is a patriarchal society. Women face social insecurity, disrespectful environment, negligence in decision making, etc. Politically gender equality is one of the major priorities of the public policy for the advancement of women in the country. However, women in Pakistan are living according to old customs and traditions which fence their political empowerment. Musharraf and successor governments have taken a significant move in this regard to give them voice, and to make them part of decision making and legislation.

This paper focuses on socio-political constraints in political empowerment of women. It analyses the political parties' manifestos and practice regarding gender inequality. Study concludes that stereotypical gender divisions of labour, societal attitude and lack of political will are primarily to blame for gender inequality in politics. However, long term transformation of Pakistan as gender-balanced state needs policy formulation, effective implementation and strong political will.

KEY WORDS: Male Dominance Political Inequality, Women Empowerment, Patriarchal Structure, Quota, Women Representation

INTRODUCTION

The word Gender refers to both men and women. They are born equal, but social construction differentiates them on the basis of their stereotype roles. Gender inequality is the unequal distribution of finance, power, and privilege between men and women. It is common scene that majority of women are under the domination of men. In the west and Europe, laws were made from time to time to give sufficient protection, freedom and equality to women. Women rights have been linked with human rights. Gender inequality and women discrimination in developing countries still exist. Pakistani women also face gender inequality in different environments and places.

In Pakistan, different strategies and techniques have emerged at different times for advancement of women. Each government addressed empowerment of women and gender equality as important part of its public policy. The formulations of public policies across gender are in conformity with global agenda. Each succeeding policy has tried to deal differently with the issues of previous strategies, but impacts of all gender equality approaches in the past on society have remained dissatisfactory.

In the short history of Pakistan, the Musharraf government (1999-2008) and successor parliaments have had maximum representation of women in politics. This has been due to the understanding of leaders regarding gender equality as one of major variable for national development in contemporary global environment. The current study attempts to unearth How Musharraf and successor governments' policies addressed political dimension of inequalities across gender in Pakistan? It is argued in this research that governments of Pakistan, during last decade, designed policies to bring balance between genders just to achieve their political interests. So these policies were not so successful to decrease gender inequalities and bring about real change for women in society. The purpose of study is to find the reasons of governments' failure to address political inequalities across gender in their true essence. This study concludes that transformation of Pakistan as gender-balanced state needs policy formulation, effective implementation by the governments and strong political will of political parties.

This paper consist of mainly two sections, section one is addressing situation of gender inequality prevailing in Pakistani society while section two discussing the concept of political inequality and role of political parties regarding gender inequality. At the end conclusion is included.

Section 1: Gender inequality in Pakistan

Pakistan has very poor gender indicators. It ranks 115 on the UN Development Programs. Pakistani women face exclusion from access to social services, economic opportunities and decision making [1]. Some urban, middle-class women do play a role in public life. However, most women are severely constrained by discriminatory patriarchal norms which are being reinforced by the spread of extremism. It is a reality that attitudes to deny women's fundamental rights exist in both formal and informal institutions of society. Women cannot claim any right on these institutions. Their rights and interests are overlooked by their male decision makers. This situation is one of the important topic of discussion in academia and non-academia. Gender inequality and women exclusion must, therefore, be an integral part of the government's public policy.

Pakistan is one of those countries where women are in lower number as compared to men in the population. According to population census of 1998, there are 98 women for every 102 men as against a world average of 111 women to every 100 men. Death rate of 15 to 40 years young women is 75% more than men [2]. The above demographic statistics show discrimination against women in society. Lower number of women in population is because of malnutrition, anaemia, shortage of food, negligence of girl child and unavailability of health facilities. In Pakistani society, mostly people are considered fortunate who has sons instead of daughters. The parents consider it a bad fortune to have daughters only.

Women, whether they belong to remote village or developed cities, face more or less same problems as subordinate or inferior creatures. In Pakistani society, very few women can express their choice for their partner; otherwise partner is decided by family male elders without consent of girl. If any girl raises her voice or tells her choice, she is declared as symbol of shame for not only family or surrounding but for coming generations. Mostly marriages are decided within family, tribe or *biraderies* (lineages). In some cases, decision power is handed over to a *biraderi panchayat* or tribal *Jirga* that is also headed by a male who decides fate of a girl. This is a type of organizational kinship. The situation in cities is a little better where women have chances to get education and employment, but no woman can setup career or live alone without the protection of husband, father, brother or son. If a woman is divorced or a widow and have small kids, she will be returned to her father or brother until her son is grown-up. Her son can protect her but she is not able to protect herself or her home.

Section 2: Political Inequality

Women's political empowerment and political equality refers to the autonomy of women to cast vote according to their assent, to participate in political activities, to compete in elections, to attend political demonstrations and to take decision regarding their actions, needs and priorities. In Pakistani society, women's political empowerment is foiled by patriarchal, feudal, and socio religious structure [3]. Each of these prohibits women from emergent political activities, capabilities and experiences. A number of women are present in the legislative bodies, political parties, in local, provincial or national government. However, women's presence in other fields like economy, education and health remains insignificant due to cultural and structural fences.

Constitutional Quota for Women in Pakistan since 1947-2008

Quota for women's seats was reserved in all constitutions of Pakistan from 1956 to 1973. In the first constitution; three percent quota was approved for women. According to The second Constitution of 1962 National Assembly was consisting of 156 seats, including 6 reserved seats for women. These seats were equally divided between both wings of the State [4].

Twenty women were elected as members in the Majlis-e-Shoora of General Zia in 1981. In 1985 the reserved quota was raised from 10 to 20 percent in National Assembly. This number of women remained the same in 1988 elections [5]. Musharraf government has brought a prominent change in society through policy related to women. It reserved 60 seats in National assembly. In existing parliament; women have acquired 60 seats on special quota and 11 on general seats. In the NA, 17% and at local government 33% seats, are reserved for women at present.

The below mentioned table demonstrates the number of women elected and participated in politics and decision making since independence to date in various legislative assemblies of Pakistan.

Table 1:Representation of Women in Pakistan's Legislature (1947- 2013)[6]

Sr. No	Legislatures	Total Seats	Women Elected Directly	Women Elected on reserved seats	Seats Held by Women	Percentage
1	1 st legislature Aug10,47– Oct24,54	30	-	-	2	6.7%
2	2 nd legislature May 2,55-Oct 7,58	80	-	-	0	0%
3	3 rd legislature Jun 8, 62- june12,65	156	6	-	6	3.8%
4	4 th legislature Jun 12,65- Mar25,69	156	6	-	6	3.8%
5	5 th legislature Apr 14,72-Jan 10,77	144	6	-	6	4.2%
6	6 th legislature Mar20,85- May29,88	210	1	10	11	5.2%
7	7 th legislature Mar20,85- May29,88	217	1	21	22	10.1%
8	8 th legislature Nov30,88- Aug6,90	217	4	20	24	11.1%
9	9 th legislature Nov3,90- Jul17,93	217	2	-	2	0.9%
10	10 th legislature Oct15,93- Nov5,96	217	4	-	4	1.8%
11	11 th legislature Feb15,97- Oct12,99	217	6	-	6	2.8%
12	12 th legislature Nov16,2003	342	13	61	74	21.64%
13	13 th Legislature 2008	342	11	60	71	21%
14	14 th Legislature 2013	342	10	60	70	20%

The above table clearly indicates the impact Musharraf policies to bring women in political mainstream. Throughout history of Pakistan, all governments had been reserved quota for women in political decision making and in parliament. But before Musharraf government the participation of women was not as much. Musharraf government has made public policy which is favourable for gender equality in politics. Above table showed that during Musharraf period women participation jumped from 2.8% to 21.64%.

Political Parties and Gender Inequality

Pakistan's politics rotates around two major political parties, 'the Pakistan People's Party' (PPP) and the 'Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz' (PML-N), though the significance of small parties cannot be overlooked in the democratic system of Pakistan. To explain and judge the role and pledges of all political parties, a comparative analysis about the policies defined for women empowerment and gender inequality in mainstream

political parties', the manifestos are helpful to understand how each would add towards equality and greater participation of women in politics.

a. PPP-P. Pakistan had a weak political framework since independence; it went through turmoil and bad circumstances in the form of military coups. Despite numerous hurdles, PPP is the only mainstream party that showed firm commitments and determination to women rights and empowerment since Benazir's times that took numerous initiatives like establishing Women Bank, and up gradation of women's division in cabinet started by Zia. PPP has highest women contestants on general seats. Its evidence is their efforts made till the last government's initiatives taken for women's advancement, since the time of Benazir; some recent efforts include Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) and opportunities for women at high level decision making positions. PPP Human Rights (women) Wing (PPPHRWW) was introduced as a new concept in 'ICT' Pakistan, in the 90's by Benazir to focus the problems faced by the women in multi-cultural Pakistani society. PPPHRWW is committed to secure legal, political, social and economic equality for women [7].

b. PML-N. There have been number of promises made by PML-N in its manifesto; most prominent is to abolish gender discrimination and bring improvement in women status in society. PML-N also want to introduce pro-women strategies and legislation. Party's manifesto sued that it would attempt to protect their rights such as inheritance and equality. The leadership promised to bring women in socio-political and economic spheres. They are eager to open new doors for women in banking, financial institution, law, judiciary, health, education and law enforcement institution. They promised to appoint women teachers in primary school. They also put special attention on professional and higher education of women. Opening new women's health care centres; economic empowerment of women through targeted micro-credit are also part of the party's manifesto[8].

c. PML-Q. PMLQ proclaims women should have equal rights and they should be provided with equal opportunities. It is observed that women are more productive than men and therefore, they planned to make arrangements to ensure their contribution. They can equally contribute in our economy, politics and society. PML-Q will eliminate gender discrimination. They promised that their policy would be "violence free environment for women" (PML-Q manifesto). PML-Q's manifesto promises to bring about decrease in the gender gap in education through behavioural change and introducing education for girls an acceptable social norm. They fail to provide details about specific ways to bring that change and seem to have no concrete actions plan [9].

d. PTI. PTI developed a Gender Policy in its elections manifesto 2013; it promised to allocate special funds for women's health care and highlighted the need to address discriminatory laws hindering women's progress in every sector [10] For implementing this policy, they promised to ensure provincial ministries for women, along with provision of training programs, subsidies, and monetary incentives to increase opportunities for women's economic empowerment. PTI manifesto offers more concrete steps for women's empowerment which emphasis on women inclusion in economic, social and political mainstream. PTI shows intentions to active the women ministry at provincial and federal levels to deal with women issues. Leadership have planned to set up one step Insafgahsat union council level to provide economic and legal assistance to women [11].

e. MQM. MQM has not a specific particular section devoted to women empowerment. Policies concerning women, minorities and children rights are addressed under the section named 'Human Rights'. They emphasize on social justice and elimination of unequal practices such as *karokari* and *vani* through legislative measures. It fails in setting some concrete steps for promoting education and health care for women [12].

f. ANP. Although ANP belongs to a tribal majority area of Pakistan, ANP has most extensive and concrete agenda on women's inclusion in all affairs including politics and economy. ANP manifesto aims to remove the condition of a male guardian for adult women who are applying for national identity cards. This attitude shows the party's commitment to raise women as independent decision makers [13].

g. JI. Jamaat Islami aims to amend laws according to Shariah like inheritance and family laws. JI manifesto has no clear stance on women's political representation which means the party is in favour of the omission of women from politics.

Analysing critically, the manifestos of major political parties' show that they make strong assurances on women's rights and women empowerment on paper but they are not successful in taking practical steps to achieve their claims. Such statements seem plain expressions for attracting more vote bank and political support than essence. These manifestos' lack in providing practical support to ensure gender balance and women's empowerment in different sectors.

The ANP manifesto includes strong progressive statements about equality of rights, but their practical value reduces as there is no clear measure stated to ensure women's political representation. Therefore their approach is traditional regarding women rights.

The PML-N manifesto includes some intentions towards gender equality. They want to increase women's representation in central policymaking bodies and committees, but practically they have not achieved all goals in this regard. PML-N has been, in the past and at present, uncertain in repealing discriminatory laws regarding women rights. Similarly PML-Q also restricted itself to passing statements than taking actual supportive measures regarding women's empowerment and equality [14]. PPP remained consistent as mainstream party on

the subject of commitments and concrete action for women's rights and empowerment. PPP has focus on social development with an increase in education and health sector as essentials of social development on the top of its agenda [15].

It is observed that the number of women who contested the 2013 elections gone down. Total 36 women have been awarded tickets for general seats of National Assembly, in comparison to the 34 candidates in 2008 and 38 in the 2002 elections. The below mentioned table show comparison of women candidates across party;

Table 2. Women candidates on General Seats in 2013 election [16]

Political Party	Percentage of tickets awarded to women
PPP	7.0%
PML (F)	6.9%
APML	4.8%
PML (N)	3.7%
PML (Q)	3.7%
ANP	3.5%
MQM	3.3%
PTI	2.2%

Table 3: Women representation in political Parties Decision Making [17]

Political Party	Women representation in party Decision making committees	Percentage of participation
PPP	2 out of 37	5.4%
PMLN	3 out of 60	5%
MQM	1 out of 12	8.3%
ANP	2 out of 18	11.1%
PTI	5 out of 40	12.5%
PAT	3 out of 30	10%
JWP	2 out of 32	6.2%
BNP	4 out of 55	7.2%

Above facts showed horizontally inequality across gender in political parties' decision making wings. The above ratio showed discriminatory behaviour across gender. Political parties should ensure women's representation at party leadership positions assuming democratic norms within party. Parties should be considered to adopt voluntary targets and quotas to guarantee women to be elected other than constitutional quota. Political Parties must identify issues curtailing women's political participation and their solution on priority basis.

Hurdles in Women's Political Empowerment

Women's participation in politics is just to cast vote. It consists of a number of freedoms, as to speak out and stand for something; assemble groups; participation in public affairs; to compete in election; to be elected and to hold office at the highest levels of decision making. According to international laws and commitments both men and women equal rights and chances to participate in all activities of political affairs. However, it is very simple to speak about rights but often hard for women to exercise these rights in practice. There are frequent barriers and challenges for women to choose politics as a career in traditional and cultural societies, and it requires special method to ensure the implement these rights.

In Pakistan, the Constitution granted right of political participation to women. There are no formal legal obstacles for women's entry into politics in theory; however in practice, there are various complications for women's political empowerment. These hurdles need to be identified and addressed in order to ensure gender equality and implementation of laws.

Traditionally politics has been male dominated, that is unwelcoming and hostile for many women. Pakistan is a patriarchal and traditional society with deep rooted patriarchal values having objection on women's entry into politics. In addition, culture is non-supportive and a hurdle, including scarcity of financial resources, lower levels of education, less access to information, greater family responsibilities and discrimination and deprivation of rights provide them with few opportunities to acquire political experience. Those women who enter into politics are the close relatives of male politicians, like Benazir Bhutto, Begum Naseem Wali khan,

Maryam Nawaz, Maryam Aurangzeb, Saira Tarar etc., otherwise women generally lack in the political networks necessary for success.

Male domination of formal political structure is a major factor that hindered women's political empowerment. In addition to this, the socio-cultural dependency of women is one of the key factors to their political participation in public political field. Women's economic dependency and lack of access to ownership of productive resources contribute in limiting the scope of their political work [18]. In such a career, illiteracy and ignorance of women regarding their rights and duties in relation to politics hinder women's political empowerment.

Patriarchy as an ideological system of male domination shapes women relation in politics. It transforms male and female into man and woman and constructs the hierarchy of gender relation where man is privileged and woman is deprived. Thus patriarchy is a familial, social, ideological, political system in which man by force, direct pressure or through rituals, tradition, law, language, customs, education, and the division of labour, determine what part women shall or shall not play in which the female is everywhere considered below the male [19].

Hence patriarchal norms practiced throughout the world and especially in Pakistani society influences other dimensions of social life, because man is more superior to woman, thus power politics is best suited to men than women. Patriarchy affects women decisions related to their career, selection of life partner, vote casting and political affiliation thus making women as second class citizens deprived of enjoying equal status and decision making power at all levels, confining women to domestic activities of household and child rearing.

Political parties play important role in women's political empowerment. Political parties are very influential in shaping women's political projection. Democratic governments and international organizations are working to increase the women's sharing in elections and also focus on the role of political parties to that end. Other than parties, women can enlarge their involvement by joining civil society organizations, NGO's and media which collectively can provide opportunities for women's political empowerment.

Political factors are enlisted as hurdles to women's entry into politics. There is male domination in politics, political parties and the culture of formal political structures is another factor that hinders women's political participation. Often male dominated political parties have a male perspective on issues of national importance that ignore women's perspectives and are not reflected in party politics. Women are not elected to high positions of decision making within parties because of gender biases of male leadership. Meetings of councils or parliamentary sessions are held in odd timings conflicting with women's domestic responsibilities.

Political party law is another form of guarantee for women to be elected. Most countries have law to regulate, to organize and register political parties which can be a fundamental tool in establishing mechanism for women's political advancement. The main parties are controlled by few male leaders who may be reluctant or less receptive to such law and reluctant to select large number of women candidates. Transparency in party elections is also a prerequisite to give women better chances to emerge as political leaders. This law may also ensure it with a provision of gender equality within it [20]. Pakistan can follow this root by adopting this law to improve women's political participation.

There are special women wings in most of the political parties in the world and in Pakistan to increase women participation in politics. Through this strategy parties are providing chances for women to become active and to get political experiences. Women's wings can influence on party decisions, especially on issues related to women development and may lead to decrease marginalization of women in the party. Parties can provide their platform to address gender inequality and other issues of women by increasing representation of women in parties' decision making and can offer incentive for women to be involved in the political process. Political parties might encourage women's input by captivating gender-sensitive issues like violence against women, inequality in unemployment, housing, education, and social issues such as family planning and reproductive health.

The quota system as a strategy to increase women's representation aims to address the problems of women's under representation. One of the most effective affirmative actions are seen through Quotas in increasing women's political representation with positive impact on the number of women represented. Though the quota system has increased number of women in the assemblies but it is a temporary measure to reach at the goal of gender balance. It does not facilitate competition and democratic participation of women. Women are considered mere numbers to fill in statistics with a low political and economic power. Although quotas have increased women in politics, but in reality this system is not more than mere symbolic. The above mentioned points are constraints and can be converted into opportunities simultaneously with implementation and commitment. Likewise quota is at the same time a strategy to increase participation and make hurdles for women; it give voice to the unheard, and is a hurdle as it restricts numerical strength of women [21].

Women at present are more aware of their political rights which are another significant element for women's collective and individual capacity. This political consciousness is the result of increased awareness through different sources like media, social media, NGO's and civil society organizations, and in this way women's inclusion is possible in the politics and development of Pakistan. Hence civil society and women's

specific initiatives are necessary for making women more active in political arena and increase their capacity to turn politics and development into women's favour. Women's overburdened and multiple roles as productive, reproductive and public activity need to be stress-free in order to make women more visible and effective competitors in politics[22]. Women's political empowerment is the prerequisite in achieving sustainable social, cultural, economic and political security among all individuals

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the position of women is inferior as a group in Pakistan's male dominated social structure and they do not have their opinion in the economic and political matters. The policies regarding gender equality in politics during Musharraf and successor government have brought many positive effects on society. Number of women entered into the parliament. Women representation in Pakistan's parliament, although higher to that of other Muslim countries, is not equal in all provinces of the country. Women's representation is minimal in Baluchistan and completely absent in the FATA region. Female representation is essential for designing national policies specific to women's issues in these parts. There are also numerous barricades and challenges for women to choose politics as a career in Pakistan's traditional mind-set society. Mostly women who participate in to politics have near and dear relationship with male politicians, otherwise women are generally far behind in this field. It is duty of political parties to give equal participation to women in parties and decision making and encourage common women party worker to come forward and become part of the parliament

Though the quota system has played positive role in women political empowerment and increased number of women in the assemblies but it is not much effective measure to reach at the goal of gender equality; it does not facilitate competition and democratic participation of women. Women are considered mere numbers to fill in statistics with a low political and economic power. Political parties should encourage women contestants in general elections.

Transparency in party elections is also pre-requisite to give women better chances to emerge as political leaders. Women's political empowerment needs an extensive approach. Advancing women's political empowerment in Pakistan requires more steady efforts by women themselves, government, the international community and civil society collectively. Actions of all the actors are important but those of political parties are particularly more significant in this regard.

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