



Al-Qawārīr - Vol: 02, Issue: 02,
Jan – March 2021

OPEN ACCESS

Al-Qawārīr
pISSN: 2709-4561
eISSN: 2709-457X
journal.al-qawarir.com

Role of Women in Policymaking: A Review of Parliament of Pakistan after Increased Reserved Seats

Dr. Musarrat Jabeen *

*School of Integrated Social Sciences, University of Lahore, Sargodha Campus;
Former Associate Professor, University of Sargodha*

Version of Record

Received: 18-Sep-20 **Accepted:** 20-Oct-20

Online/Print: 20-March-2021

ABSTRACT

The proposition of women empowerment is multidimensional and frequently explained diversely. However, under-representation in politics is a recognized fact and need for gender parity and equality led the United Nations to recommend 30 percent seats for women in legislatures. Pakistan was included in those countries where women's representation was nominal and first two constitutions reserved only three percent seats in the assemblies whereas the constitution of 1973 reserved ten seats for women, which were doubled in 1985 by General Zia-ul-Huq, but this quota was lapsed in 1990 due to constitutional provision. Women were almost ousted from the assemblies as well as policymaking until General Musharraf revived and increased the reserved seats, allocating 17 percent in parliament and provincial assemblies, while 33 percent at local bodies. A significant number of women participated in 2002 elections and became part of policy-making. This development also raised Pakistan to the 58th position in the list of 102 countries, while it was on third position in GEM index from lower side in 1999. Here the question is about women's role in policy making, either this increased number has equally enhanced women's share in policymaking. Reviewing the existing literature and empirical facts, the study hypothesizes that numerical impact of gender quota on women's substantive representation in policy-making is not encouraging as traditional and cultural barriers have deprived them of their due share.

Key words: Policy-making, reserved seats, barriers, disparities, Glass Ceiling..

The status of women in Pakistan varies considerably across classes, regions, and the rural/urban division because of uneven socio-economic development. Above it, tribal, feudal, and capitalist social formations also influence women's lives. Today,



women enjoy a better status in Pakistan as comparison to several Muslim countries. The UN and other feminist organizations made a huge struggle to increase women's effective participation in politics. After implementation of Beijing Plan of 1995, several countries either de facto or de jure adopted the gender quotas to increase women participation in legislative bodies. This participation was through electoral quota or direct election. For example Burundi, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda adopted 30 percent quota through constitutional provisions. The Nordic countries increased women's role by ratifying CEDAW and supporting women political parties and feminist organizations. In these countries, women almost achieved half of the representation in assemblies whereas African countries like Rwanda surpassed European countries while developing countries like Philippines, Burundi, Eritrea and several other countries empowered women by allocating 33 percent or more seats in their legislatures. However, Arab states due to their distinctive culture and religious values were not prepared to bring women on front lines and representation was very low. Israel has 23 percent women in parliament. The global trends of women empowerment also increased gender representation in Asian region. The Philippine, India, Indonesia, Bangladesh and Pakistan are empowering women through adoption of different types of quotas.

In spite of regional, cultural and religious handicaps this region has maximum number of women at the top level leadership. Such as Corazon Aquino of Philippine, Khalida Zia and Hasina Wajid of Bangladesh, Indira Gandhi of India, Sirivamo of Bandarika, Chandrika Kumaratunga of Sri Lanka and Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan. Although these leaders filled the space created by the assassination of their fathers or husbands but their representation, however was a positive step towards women's empowerment. But in spite of women leadership women political representation is still low at 11.3 percent only. In Bangladesh women have 18.55 percent representation in parliament. Bhutan has monarchical system of government women have 8.5 percent representation in parliament. Nepal has democratic system of government with 33.77 percent women representation. Sri Lanka is also democratic country women political representation is 5.33 percent (UN women joint).

In 1948, in very beginning after independence, the first constituent assembly was formed. The assembly had two very determined and iconic lady members, Begum Shaista Ikram Ullah and Begum Jahan Ara Shahnawaz. These ladies worked very hard in the immediate aftermath of independence. They tried to achieve women rights which they are entitled by Islam. They argued that Pakistan is achieved for the enforcement of Islamic law. They demanded that Islam is a universal religion and it provides equal rights to women as men. After very

dedicated and hard struggle they succeeded in achieving an Islamic law called Muslim Personal Law of Shariah. This law recognized the right of women to inherit all kinds of property according to the true spirit of Islamic Law in the newly created state Pakistan. The first legislature of Pakistan in 1947 had two women representatives, Begum Jahan Ara Shah Nawaz and Begum Shaista Kram Ullah. Both these ladies made very turning efforts for women rights and tried to recognize women's right protested that law must be passed which recognize women's right to inherit property which Islam provides to women 15 hundred year earlier. This right was not given to women because it was considered that if the property will be given to women it will fall under thy control of the men of another family in after marriage. Therefore, the achievement was very great as this women right was raised in the legislator and the law was passed in a patriarchal structured state (Jabeen, 2014).

Women actively participated in freedom movement of Pakistan. The founder of Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, appreciated women's role. After the independence of Pakistan, women activists, groups and feminist organizations supported prominent leaders like Fatima Jinnah. The provision of reservation of seats for women in the Parliament remained the constitutional history of Pakistan from 1956 to 1973. The late Benazir Bhutto, the former prime minister of Pakistan. Women are actively participating in every sector of Pakistan such as in politics, sports, media, army, police, etc. Women are holding key positions in different sector like Asma Jahangir, Fahmida Mirza: Speaker of national assembly and Rabbani Khar, Foreign minister. A woman also served as of State Bank of Pakistan. The literacy rate of females in Pakistan is at 39.6 percent compared to that of males at 67.7 percent. In urban areas, literacy rate is five times higher than rural women. The school dropout rate among females is very depressing and almost half of them left schools due to certain reasons. However, change is rapidly occurring. The public universities of Pakistan has female enrollment more than boys. Educational achievements of female students are higher as compared with male students at different levels of education.

Regional Differences

Women in elite urban districts of Pakistan enjoy a far more privileged lifestyle than those living in rural tribal areas. In 2002, 81.5 percent of 15-19 year old girls from high-income families had attended school while 22.3 percent of girls from low-income families. In comparison, 96.6 percent of Pakistani boys ages 15–19 coming from high-income families had attended schooling while 66.1 percent of 15-19 year old boys from low-income families had attended school. These rural areas often have inadequate funding and schooling for girls is at the bottom of their priorities.

The World Bank's reports of 1997 stated that women constituted only 28% of the country's labor force and two percent of Pakistani women are working. However, the 1980 agricultural census stated that the women's participation rate in agriculture was 73%. In 2008, 21.8 percent of females were participating in the labor force in Pakistan while 82.7 percent of men were involved in labor.

Woman's rights in Pakistan are a prominent issue, and many activists such as the National Plan of Action for Women and the All-Pakistan Women's Association are working hard towards equality. It is believed by some scholars that because of the strong influences of Hinduism over the Pakistani nation, it is difficult to achieve equal rights for women without reconstructing the entire culture that the country is based on. Around 90% of the Pakistani households are headed by men. Women lack ownership of productive resources. Despite women's legal rights to own and inherit property from their families, there are very few women who have access and control over these resources. Though Islam give woman half share in father property compare to son, but this is not commonly practiced, because most families paid women a lot of dowry. The basis of Pakistani constitution is Islam; a religion that has secured the rights of women fourteen hundred years ago. In Article 25(1) of the 1973 Constitution of Pakistan it is stated, "All citizens are equal before law and are entitled to equal protection of law." • Article 25(2) states "There shall be no discrimination on the basis of sex alone."

Findings of the Study

The study has observed glass ceiling barriers while analyzing the collected data. The glass ceiling barrier is defined in the Oxford Dictionary, "a circumstance or obstacle that keeps people or things apart or prevents communication or progress."¹ In this study, barriers are referred to those obstacles that prevent women to power position and effective roles in parliament of Pakistan. This study has identified structural/political and cultural/environmental barriers. Structural barriers include gender inequalities, ranging from domestic institutions to educational places, employment offices and parliamentary position. All these are the product of political culture along with social structure, which are critical to women's empowerment and prevent their path to elected offices and decision-making process. The working environment and political institutions continue to be barriers to women's authority as they are less friendly to them. Many female respondents pointed out that they were discouraged from seeking political positions by discriminatory practices, throwing them into disadvantageous position in the name of family honour and childcare responsibility. They were deprived of a political nomination or holding a public office. Low literacy and poverty also prevent them to break into electoral offices.

Political parties have been consistently identified for women's under-representation, having the role as the main 'gatekeepers' of elected decision-making positions around the globe.² They discourage women and allow entry of those women who are not much sensitive to the gender specific agenda. The characteristics attributed to political parties, consider them mediators for linking the government institutions and masses, molding social forces and ideologies, relating them with the political activity of the community. The parties are assumed to disseminate the values of the political system and mobilization of public opinion for political action. Their programmes are designed to cover the broader area of politics with working on those issues, which are of public interest and known to the masses. But they do not stimuli to the women's participatory role and women remained passive observers of electoral activities.

In Pakistan, political parties are mainly headed by males and only those females hold this position, who inherited it being relative or part of the family of leadership. In Pakistan, Fatima Jinnah, Benazir Bhutto, Nusrat Bhutto, Ghanwa Bhutto, Begum Nasim Wali Khan and Maryam Nawaz Sharif are included in this list. Most of them hold this position to continue the legacy of their male relative in their absence or death. No women ascended to the party headship position without kinship ties or family background. After having this status, women proved their merits and worth to hold these offices, but they were bound to work on party lines rather than resolving gender issues.

There have been a number of laws pertaining to the political mainstreaming of women, playing a significant role in enhancing the number of women candidates in assemblies. The Election Act, 2017 allows the Election Commission of Pakistan to declare an election void in a constituency, if women cost less than 10 percent of total votes. This provision was introduced to prevent the parties from making an agreement to restrain women from voting. The Act also bound the political parties to allocate at least five percent tickets to women on general seats in the assemblies. Practically, in the general elections of July 25, 2018, total 11,885 candidates were on the run, about 94 political parties had 5,768 male ticket holders. Only 305 female candidates were contesting, which constitute barely 5.2 per cent of the total ticket holders of political parties. About 45 per cent of political parties had not fielded a single female candidate in these elections.³ The study also dug out the double standard of religious political parties towards women as they were reluctant to award tickets to women in the name of religion while on the other hand nominated huge number of women on reserved seats.⁴ In 2013, 69 women had party tickets. Jamat-e-Islami Pakistan and Jamiat Ulma-e-Islam Pakistan did not give a single ticket to women on general seats, while nominated 165 and 131 candidates respectively. Eight parties did not field a single candidate in these elections and

women comprised about seven percent of the nominated candidates of the parties. Pakistan People's Party is the single party, which award more tickets to women in comparison to other political parties⁵ After the ECP's condition of five percent share, Allah-o-Akbar Tehreek appointed 10 female candidates, just to project a female friendly face.⁶ Despite, violation of the law, the Election Commission showed flexibility, allowing 59 political parties to contest the elections, who refused to offer a minimum number of seats to women.⁷ A report of the Aurat Foundation highlighted that male-dominated political structure determined women's political role as voters and candidates.⁸

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