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## Political Patriarchy: An Obstruction in the Way of Optimum Performance by Women Legislators from KP

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**Abstract:** *Women constitute half of the global population, but their voice in the policymaking bodies is absent. Pakistan under Pervez Musharraf introduced reserved seats for women at all three levels of the country's politics in 2002. This study about the performance of women legislators of KP revealed that as opposed to the provincial assembly of KP, women's contribution to parliamentary business in the national assembly was better than men's. Moreover, the political patriarchy was found to hinder the participation of women in the decision-making. Women MNAs on reserved seats were not given funds rendering them unable to involve in community projects and develop vote banks and brighten their prospects of contesting elections in future. Women MPAs in the KP assembly received discretionary funds, but there have been allegations that their respective parties used it for political gains, and the money was spent in the constituencies of male members on general seats*

**Key Words:** Political Patriarchy, Women Legislator, KP, Pakistan.

### Background

To build an inclusive and egalitarian society and ensure sustainable development, it is necessary to empower women and create gender equality. Democratic development and good governance cannot be guaranteed without including women's perspectives in policymaking. The achievement of these goals depends upon the participation of women in politics (Sadan, 1997).

It is essential to mention that political participation is not limited to voting alone; it also includes the liberty to speak out, assemble and associate. Participation in public affairs, registering oneself as a candidate, campaigning, and holding public office are various aspects of political participation. As per international standards, all aspects of politics are open for equal participation of men and women. However, the ground realities are not very encouraging. Women in different parts of the world struggle to exercise their political rights and demonstrate equal participation in the political arena (Bari, 2005).

Pakhtun society is predominantly patriarchal in socio-cultural, economic, political, and religious structure, and the system of male dominance shapes women's political relationships, transforming males and females into their own hierarchy of gender relations, with men as dominant and privileged. (Eisenstein, 1984). According to Naz (2010), such a distinction puts women in the reproductive unit position and confines them to the position of mothers and spouses inside the domestic domain, while males are breadwinners and controllers of the home and public domain. Haq (2000) explains that such attitudes and practices penetrate political, economic, legal, socio-cultural, and religious structures worldwide, controlling women's reproductive capacity and placing their sexuality in the hands of males. In Pakhtun society, the patriarchal social structure, lengthy historical traditions, male dominance, and practice of Purdah have a detrimental impact on women's standing in education (Bari, 2000). Pakhtun society's patriarchal framework provides males with higher status in several sectors of life, including household and

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civic life. In a traditional society, boys traditionally carry the family's economic duty. Therefore parents choose to spend more on males as though their old age social security is linked to the higher economic capacity of their sons ([Pande and Astone, 2001](#)). Furthermore, there is a widespread misconception about investing in daughters, which holds that she will no longer assist her parents once a girl marries. Women's engagement in many socio-cultural and political activities is devalued due to such misperceptions ([Haq, 2000](#)).

The global presence of women in the structures of governance that regulate political and legislative priorities is very low. Although women's presence in parliaments since 2005 has slightly improved, their proportion as ministers is still meagre. Similarly, the proportion of female heads of state is less than 5%, as calculated in 2011 ([IPU, 2011](#)). The dismal count of women in politics continues despite three decades of efforts to empower women and eliminate gender discrimination by the international community. The United Nations realized the importance of women's role in development in 2000 and included the empowerment of women as one of the Millennium Development Goals; however, the world seems to have a hard time achieving the target of 30 per cent women in decision-making positions ([UNDP, 2012](#)).

Before and after the partition, Pakistan has seen women leaders of significant national prominence. Begum Shah Nawaz, a prominent Muslim woman leader in India, spoke on behalf of Muslim women at Round Table Conferences, the Geneva League of Nations session in 1931, and the International Labor Organization in 1935. She gained fame for her 1948 attempts to have the Muslim Personal Law of Sharia acknowledge women's ability to inherit property and for her demand for a women's quota in United India's legislative assembly. She, along with Begum Shaista Ikram Ullah and Begum Ra'ana Liaquat Ali Khan, represented women in the first constituent assembly of Pakistan. Her complete political career is filled with the struggle for the socio-cultural uplift of women. All Pakistan Women's Association (APWA) was founded by her. Similarly, Miss Fatima Jinnah, Begum Salma Tassaduq Hussain, Begum Muhammad Ali Jauhar, Geti Ara Bashir Ahmed, Abadi Begum, Begum Viqarunnisa Noon, Lady Sughra Hidayatullah, Lady Nusrat Haroon, and Begum Nawab Muhammad Ismail are a few noteworthy women leaders who actively participated in the freedom movement and continued their political participation after 1947 ([Siddiqi, 2015](#)).

After independence, Benazir Bhutto, who was the Prime Minister of Pakistan twice, Nusrat Bhutto, who remained the chairperson of the Pakistan People's

Party; Fahmida Mirza, the first woman speaker of the National Assembly of Pakistan, and Hina Rabbani Khar (ex-Foreign Minister) are the noteworthy women of Pakistan's political system. Despite the fact that Pakistan was the first Muslim country with a woman head of state, the overall presence of women in the national assembly has been very disappointing since independence ([Siddiqi, 2015](#)).

As per the first two constitutions of Pakistan, i.e. 1956 and then 1962, women got six reserved seats in the National Assembly. The 1973 constitution reserved 10 seats for women but for a specified duration of the coming 10 years or the next three general elections, whichever occurred later. General Zia ul Haq increased the number of reserved seats to 20, but after three general elections of 1977, 1985, and 1988 these seats lapsed; hence, in the subsequent three elections of 1990, 1993, and 1997, there were no women reserved seats. As a result of political reforms introduced by General Pervaiz Musharraf, the number of reserved seats for women increased to 60 in 2002 ([PILDAT, 2004](#)).

Four hundred nineteen (419) women contested during general elections 2013 for National and all provincial assemblies on general seats. One hundred sixty women (160) competed on party tickets, while 259 were independent candidates. For the National Assembly, a total number of 135 women contested elections in 2013 on general seats. Only 9 out of 135 women contestants won general seats in the National Assembly. For the provincial assembly of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the number of women who contested election on general seats in 2013 was 26, while for general seats of the National Assembly, the number of women from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was 18. Unfortunately, none of these female contestants managed to win the elections. All 22 women members of the provincial assembly of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and 8 members of the National Assembly from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are on reserved seats for women. Compared to nine in 2013 and 16 in the general election of 2008, only eight of the 172 women who ran for general seats in the National Assembly in 2018 succeeded. Three of the eight successful candidates were from the Pakistan Peoples Party, two from the Pakistan Tehreek e Insaaf, and one from each of the PML-N, the Grand Democratic Alliance (GDA), and the BAP. A number of aspiring women struggled to raise the deposit needed to file their candidacy. Among the winners, 4 belonged to Sind, 3 to Punjab, and 1 to Baluchistan. No woman from KP could win her seat in the general elections in 2018.

There is no doubt that reservation improved women's representation in legislative bodies; however, studies revealed that the distribution of opportunity for women to be elected on general seats or nominated on reserved seats in national or provincial assemblies is not uniform. Women in legislatures hail from political and feudal elite families ([UNDP Pakistan, 2005](#)). Women politicians either play proxies for male members of the feudal families who are barred from participation in elections for any reason or are an extension of the male members of feudal families in politics. For example, during the Senate elections in 2015, the speaker of the Baluchistan assembly, Jan Muhammad Jamali (PML-N), refused to withdraw his daughter's name in favour of a candidate chosen by the party. In another case, an MPA of the Sindh assembly Parveen Junejo was elected to a general seat as a proxy for her husband, who could not contest elections for legal reasons. After the separation of the couple, Ms Junejo was compelled to resign from her seat. The process of unseating her was handled like a typical case in tribal Jirga to ensure her prompt removal from the position (DAWN, May 25, 2015).

The available literature on women's participation and empowerment in politics suggests that a gender quota is an effective tool in resolving the segregation of women from the formal structure of politics. However, to achieve the goal of women empowerment through political participation, ideological, political, socio-cultural, and economic factors hindering parallel participation of women along with men in politics must be addressed ([Bari, 2005](#)).

### Methodology

The performance of women legislators from KP was measured in terms of their parliamentary contribution and the service they rendered to their communities during their tenure that is from 2013 to 2018. For parliamentary contribution, reports published by Aurat Foundation, FAFEN, & UNDP were secondary data sources. For community service, primary data was collected from women legislators from KP in the national assembly and provincial assembly of KP.

The study was conducted in 2019, and women members of the national assembly and provincial assembly of KP from 2013 to 2018 were selected as respondents. The total number of respondents was 30, out of which 22 could be interviewed. The remaining eight members could not spare time to participate in the study.

An interview guide was used for data collection from the respondents. The contact information of the respondents was obtained from the members'

directory present on the official website of the provincial assembly of KP (<https://www.pakp.gov.pk/>). The respondents were telephonically contacted, and their consent was obtained for participation in the study. Before conducting interviews, the respondents were briefed about the nature and objectives of the PhD projects. They were ensured that confidentiality would be maintained in the presentation of data. The interviews were recorded with the permission of the respondents, and recordings were used for subsequent transcription. The responses were thematically analyzed using verbatim analysis and previous literature.

### Performance of Women Legislators of the 14th National Assembly

A report on the performance of the 14<sup>th</sup> National Assembly of Pakistan (2013–2018) by FAFEN reveals that 237 bills were moved by private members, out of which women MNAs on reserved seats initiated the majority (134 or 56%). However, the male members elected to the National Assembly on general seats introduced 82 bills. Minority lawmakers introduced twenty-one bills. Four of the ten top performers in moving private member bills were female, including Dr Nikhat Shakeel Khan, Kishwar Zehra, Saman Sultana Jafri, and Dr Fouzia Hameed.

During the housing tenure, the lawmakers moved 464 resolutions highlighting various local, national, and international issues. Out of 342 members of the National Assembly, 199 members, including 139 men and 60 women, contributed to these resolutions. Based on the number of resolutions moved, the top ten performers included four women, namely Aisha Syed, Naema Kishwar Khan, Nafisa Shah, and Shazia Marri. During the question-hour session, 13,912 questions were asked from 44 ministries and departments of the government during the period from 2013 to 2018. Gender-wise analysis reveals that more women (81%) exercised their right to ask questions than men (50%). Despite their 23% strength in the house, 7,909 (57%) questions were asked by women while the men asked 6,003 (43%) questions. Seven of the ten top-performing MNAs with respect to asking questions were women. Lawmakers submitted 533 Calling Attention Notices during five years of the 14<sup>th</sup> assembly. Out of 342, 228 lawmakers, including 64 women and 164 men, highlighted the public importance issues through Calling Attention Notices. Eight out of the ten MNAs with the highest number of Calling Attention Notices were women. Lawmakers moved 329 motions under Rule 259 during the term of the 14<sup>th</sup> assembly highlighting various issues of public

importance. As many as 74 lawmakers, including 31 women, sponsored these Motions under Rule 259 (FAFEN, 2018).

### **Performance of Women members of the Provincial Assembly of KP (2013–2018)**

The performance of the women member of the Provincial Assembly of KP was also studied from 2013–2018. FAFEN report on the performance of women legislators of KP for the period from May 2013 to February 2018 reveals that women demonstrated higher interest in attending Assembly proceedings than men, as evident from their attendance record. The average attendance of a female parliamentarian was 167 (76%) compared to the average attendance of a male member, which was 133 (64%) sittings. Individual attendance of the majority of women parliamentarians was found to be more than 70%. During the evaluation period, more than one-fifth of the agenda of the house was contributed by women lawmakers. They asked 693 (20%) questions and submitted 8 adjournment motions (16%). Women parliamentarians also demonstrated interest in overseeing the executive's performance by submitting 47 (17%) Calling Attention Notices. They also contributed to the legislative work by sponsoring 17 private member bills and 46% of the resolutions (FAFEN, 2017).

According to a UNDP press release, the Women's Parliamentary Caucus was constituted through a unanimous resolution by the KP Provincial Assembly in May 2015. The purpose of the Women's Parliamentary Caucus was to bring together all 22 women members of the Parliament irrespective of party affiliations. Two major contributions of the Women's Parliamentary Caucus were to increase the number of reserved seats for women from 22 to 25 and pass anti-domestic violence laws.

To ensure the caucus's effective contribution, UNDP helped establish a fully equipped secretariat so that women members of the Parliament could gather there for meetings and mutual learning.

Gender quota is supposed to pave the way for genuine women leadership by increasing the capacity of women parliamentarians, giving women role models in politics, and moulding social perceptions in favour of women leadership. However, the recent political history of the elections in 2002, 2008, and 2013 shows no such improvement as 60 women made their way to Parliament on reserved seats in each election while 14, 18, and 9 women were elected on general seats in elections 2002, 2008 2013 respectively. The numerical

visibility of women in the national and provincial legislatures and the Senate since 2002 has brought the spotlight on their role and performance in advancing women's equality agenda in policy and legislation (Bari, 2015; FAFEN, 2014). The background of women members of Parliament elected on general seats revealed that most of them hail from Punjab. Out of the 18 female members elected on general seats in the 13<sup>th</sup> National Assembly, 13 were from Punjab and 5 from Sindh. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan had no representation. It indicates that quota is least affecting the environment for women leadership in areas with conservative cultural tendencies.

### **Role of women Parliamentarians in Community Development**

Women are subjected to an environment which is outrightly different from that of men. Men earn while women run household affairs. This leads to the dependency of women on men for their basic needs like food, health, shelter and education. In addition, the gender role expected of women completely moulds their lifestyle. The lifestyle difference between men and women may result in variation in priorities between genders. The purpose of this section is to evaluate the difference brought about by women on reserved seats in parliamentary output related to community development. Different aspects of community development considered were a contribution to policymaking, differences in priorities between men and women, and community-related projects introduced by women parliamentarians. The respondents were asked about the contribution of women on reserved seats to the policymaking, and their responses are analyzed in the following paras.

### **Contribution of women to policymaking**

Data shows that women have been leading men in their contribution to the working of Parliament. Their attendance in parliamentary sessions has been better, and they have been demonstrating greater interest in contributing to the legislative work than men have. This might be an indication that we are moving in the right direction, as there is no other way to break patriarchal stereotypes but through hard work and character.

Respondent no. 1 suggested that:

*"I think they can bring change by participating in legislative activities. In addition, I would suggest that they do away with the submissive behaviour and start standing up for themselves. Only then can they make*

*the patriarchs realize their importance*" (Field Notes, September 5, 2018).

Women on reserved seats in the Parliament of KP have contributed significantly to important legislation regarding social issues. Respondent no. 2 rightly pointed out that:

*"Women have a prominent role in legislation against social issues like child marriages, acid attacks, and domestic violence. We have done a good job in the caucus. Women's priorities differ from those of males, and men focus on infrastructures like roads, drainage, and big vote-earning projects. Women, however, are interested in resolving women's issues, water and sanitation, environment and education. Personally, I am also working on vocational centres"* (Field Notes, September 6, 2018).

Not everyone in the Parliament has the same capacity to serve the community. A female cabinet member, for example, can directly decide about matters coming under the ambit of her ministry. Similarly, the role and capacity of a member of a certain parliamentary committee differ from an ordinary parliamentarian. A parliamentarian without a portfolio or a committee membership can pass a resolution and then strive to make it part of the agenda for discussion. Thus, most of the women on reserved seats, usually with weaker political networking inside the Parliament as compared to men, have a little capacity to bring about a tangible change in the living standard of their community. This issue was highlighted by respondent no. 6 in her following statement:

*"We can contribute better to policy making once we get portfolios. Other than that, we can push for various legislations in the assembly. If I am in the cabinet, I will give my input on matters relating to the particular department directly to the chief minister and the secretaries of that particular department. Right now, all we can do is present an attention notice or pass a resolution and make the speaker include that in the agenda of the assembly. Thus without having a ministerial position, the efforts to bring about change take too long to produce tangible results"* (Field Notes, October 1, 2018).

In comparison to the spectrum of problems women face in our society, the number of women on reserved seats is too few. It will not be justified to expect these women to bring social revolution overnight; they, however can work on core gender issues to ripen the environment for their enhanced political participation. Major problems, which need to be addressed, are education, participation in paid jobs for financial empowerment and social awareness against the

morbidities of patriarchy. Respondent no. 15 shared her views as follows:

*"Initially, my projects were almost identical to those presented by male MPAs, but the Chief Minister rightly emphasized that the women MPAs should present projects related to women issues in the society. Therefore, I allocated two vocational training centres to every female MPA and one to all the male MPAs for establishment in their respective constituencies as a minister of welfare in KP"* (Field Notes, December 16, 2018).

*As far as equal political participation of women is concerned, In addition to women raising their voices against injustices, infrastructural changes are required to educate women regarding their civil and political rights. Women in our society are not aware of their own plight, so what good can a few shouts here and there do for equal political participation of women. Therefore, to ripen conditions for women empowerment and their equal political participation, we must first work on these prerequisites"* (Field Notes, December 16, 2018).

The patriarchal mindset is ubiquitous. It prevails everywhere, even in the assembly. Given the level of seriousness regarding women's empowerment, it becomes really difficult for a woman on the reserved seat to even secure a few minutes for talking on the floor, let alone convince the patriarchs about women's issues. Respondent no. 20 highlighted this issue in the following manner:

*"Women have to fight to get a chance to talk on the floor of the assembly. The current speaker is gender biased and shows complete apathy towards women issues"* (Field Notes, January 22, 2019).

Unlike elected members of the Parliament, women in reserved seats do not represent any constituency. Elected members are respected as representatives of their voters. They can lead to the house for developmental projects and funds in the name of their electorates. Government and political parties listen to them as offending them would be equivalent to offending their electorates and hence political problems. Women on reserved seats do not represent any constituency and therefore are mostly ignored when they demand funds for developmental projects in a particular constituency. Respondent no. 16 put this into her words as below:

*"When a woman is on a reserved seat, she is neither heard in the Parliament nor given any funds for development. In the case of elected members, including women, this is not an issue. They can get financial support for the initiation of projects worth*

*billions of rupees. It helps them to keep their electorate happy and satisfied. Since this luxury is not available to women on reserved seats, they cannot establish themselves as politicians."*

The opinions of the respondents on what women in reserved seats contributed to the community can be summarized as follows:

Women on reserved seats have been very active in matters related to legislation, particularly concerning women's issues. They, however, could not significantly affect the community by getting developmental projects approved by the Parliament. This failure can be attributed to the prevalence of a patriarchal mindset in the Parliament, domination of males in terms of numbers, and lack of electorates for whose rights women on reserved seats can fight. Moreover, it is less likely for them to be given a portfolio, and without cabinet membership, they have no proper access to the decision-making circle.

### **Availability of Financial support for Community Development**

As far as funds are concerned, the respondent no. 1, who happened to be an MNA, stated that:

*"If the projects you propose in the assembly are good, they are appreciated; however, you do not get any funding for those. It is much easier for women who get elected on general seats to get funding approved for their projects in comparison to women on reserved seats"* (Field Notes, September 5, 2018).

Respondent no. 13, who was also an MNA, partially agreed with the above statement that they got no discretionary funds for development. She, however, added that she kept on raising issues of her area in the assembly until she succeeded in moving the government to provide funds for the resolution of those issues. The issues were mainly related to drinking water, sanitation, roads and education. She also managed to attract the NGOs' attention to her area's problems and extract funding from them. (Field Notes, December 6, 2018).

Respondent no. 12, another MNA, lamented that women on reserved seats were not given discretionary funds for development in their area. She pointed out that each male member of the national assembly was given rupees 2 crores as discretionary funds, which was denied to the women on reserved seats on the pretext that they do not represent any constituency. She emphasized that women in reserved seats can do a lot for the uplift of their community, depending on their willpower and dedication. She underscored how her efforts to establish the office of the Trade

Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP) in Swat and arrange an Expo of TDAP in Swat were successful. She also attributed the development of roads and the Women's Campus of Swat University to her continuous struggle. Respondent no. 11, also an MNA, contributed to the energy sector in her area. She struggled with the development of projects related to the supply of natural gas and electricity. (Field Notes, November 15, 2018).

However, some of the members of the provincial assembly conceded that they were given discretionary funds and spent those on community development projects. Respondent no. 6 mentioned that:

*"During the last tenure, we got funds for community development programs just like the other MPAs. This government has put a ban on all developmental funds that were previously put at the discretion of MPAs and has instead diverted those funds to the district and local governments of those particular constituencies. In addition to the budgetary allocation of funds for some schemes, every MPA was given a discretionary fund of about 20 million rupees. I spent that money on building vocational training centres for women and the distribution of sewing machines among women under the community development program. Moreover, I also spent those funds on the development of water supply schemes and pavement of muddy streets. In addition to these projects, the government built an examination hall in the girls' school of our area and upgraded our BHU to RHC on my recommendations."* (Field Notes, October 1, 2018).

In comparison to MNAs, MPAs were very satisfied with the fact that they received funds for community development projects. They were especially encouraged by the then provincial government to bring projects related to women's empowerment. Respondent no. 15 quoted the then Chief Minister as saying:

*"Bring as many projects as you can be related to women empowerment"* (Field Notes, December 16, 2018).

Some women MPAs on reserved seats mentioned that the male MPAs of their constituencies used their funds to inflate their own vote bank. Women MPAs on reserved seats were convinced to withdraw their funds in favour of male MPAs to ensure the party's success in the constituency in terms of vote bank. Respondent no. 22 observed that:

*"We got discretionary funds amounting to 30 million in the third year of our tenure. However, since the funds were not named so, our MPA transferred my*

fund to his name without my knowledge. I have made a sewing centre, and apart from that, there was a serious issue of water in my area for which I funded about 60 to 70 pressure pumps." (Field Notes, February 12, 2019).

Respondent no. 4 stated that she had been striving hard to resolve the power issues of her area, and finally, the Chief Minister approved funds of rupees one crore to fulfil her demand. She revealed that the elected MPA of her constituency approached her with a request to use that fund to expand his own vote bank.

While commenting on the issue, respondent no. 2 stated that:

*"Some parliamentarians bribe women on reserved seats with commission up to 30% to spend their funds in their own constituency. The people who claim that there are no funds for females, I don't know why are they saying so, if they have not used their funds they definitely would have let somebody else do that in return of some favours monetary or other"* (Field Notes, September 6, 2018).

To summarize the discussion, female MNAs on reserved seats did not get any discretionary funds. They, however, were encouraged to bring projects related to community development for discussion on the floor of the house. In contrast, women MPAs were given discretionary funds in addition to the financial support they received from the government for some very important community development projects. They highlighted issues like roads, electricity, sanitation, water, etc. The respondents reported male MPAs (elected) using the discretionary funds of women MPAs for their own political gains. One respondent, however, claimed that women MPAs hand over their discretionary funds to male MPAs in return for favours.

## Discussion

Women members of the 14<sup>th</sup> National Assembly remained prominent in their contribution to the parliamentary business. Despite being low in number, they nearly moved as many bills as male MNAs. Regarding their contribution to the total number of resolutions moved in the assembly is concerned women members slightly lagged behind male MNAs. Still, in each case (bills and resolutions), 4 of the 10 top performers were women. Women members, however, had keen eyes on the performance of executives as reflected from their share in the total number of questions asked during question hour and their contribution to the calling attention notices. Unfortunately, data related to the specific performance of women MNAs from KP could not be found, but the performance of women MPAs in the provincial

assembly of KP during the same time period (2013–2018) reveals that women members from KP are not as effective/vocal as some women members of the National Assembly. Statistics show that the contribution of women members of the provincial assembly of KP to the total number of bills, resolutions and questions approached 20%, which is significantly lower than the trend observed in the National Assembly. This difference in performance can be attributed to cultural variation among the provinces.

Women members from KP tried to substantively represent women by contributing to women-friendly policy making, but due to factors like their low number, their status in the eye of the speaker and their own party leadership and lack of essential skills and proper training, they could not break the vicious circle of political patriarchy.

Women MNAs from KP on reserved seats did not get any discretionary funds. They, however, were encouraged to bring projects related to community development for discussion on the floor of the house. Lack of funds renders women MNAs powerless in their constituencies. Due to a lack of monetary resources to solve their prospective voters' issues, they cannot transition from reserved seats to general seats. According to scfg.org (2014), the majority of the women members of Parliament hold reserved seats, which renders them dependent on male politicians for funding and relatively powerless within the political parties to which they belong. The PTI-led government did not provide funds to members on reserved seats, including minority representatives and women members of the national and provincial assemblies. The government was of the opinion that as these members do not represent any constituency as elected members, therefore, these funds would not be utilized in a specific area (tribune.com.pk, 2019). [Khan and Naqvi \(2020\)](#) inferred from the interviews of women activists and politicians (male and female) that there is confusion about whose interests women on reserved seats represent. This lack of clarity hinders their agency in the assemblies and strengthens their impression as nothing more than proxies for male relatives who are barred from contesting elections for different reasons.

In contrast, women MPAs in KP were given discretionary funds in addition to the financial support they received from the government for some very important community development projects. The projects initiated by women MPAs were found to be similar to those initiated by men. They highlighted issues like roads, electricity, sanitation, water, etc. The respondents reported male MPAs (elected) using the

discretionary funds of women MPAs for their own political gains. One respondent, however, claimed that women MPAs hand over their discretionary funds to male MPAs in return for favours. This practice of using discretionary funds allocated to minority representatives and women parliamentarians on reserved seats by their parties (male members to increase their vote bank) is not new and the daily DAWN reported in its article published on November 26, 2008, the decision of ANP which prohibits 25 MPAs of the Party on reserved seats to fully utilize their annual discretionary funds. The party leaders decided

that onwards, 70 per cent of the funds earmarked for their development schemes would be spent by the party (dawn.com, 2008). These reports reveal structural barriers in the way of women engage themselves in community-related projects, which is making their transition from reserved seats to general seats very difficult. According to [Khan and Naqvi \(2020\)](#), the reserved seats are supposed to train and prepare women for contesting elections on general seats. The patriarchy inside the Parliament and political parties are standing in the way of the realization of this goal.



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