



Abstract: *Women's empowerment is promoting women's sagacity of self-worth, capability to decide their personal choices, and right to sway societal change for themselves. Empowering women is equipping them with utensils they want to have influence and power over their personal lives. Political parties during elections campaigns promise gender equality and women empowerment but these promises remained unfulfilled. It is a pragmatic issue in Pakistan as it ranked approximately at bottom of the Gender Gap Index – 151st out of 153 countries. The 1973 Constitution protects women's rights under various Articles. The study aims to examine women's empowerment in Pakistan from slogans to practices. It will also examine the political manifestos of parties during election campaigns and after occupying political power. The qualitative method with an exploratory approach was adopted to find out the answers to the research questions. No country can develop until half of the population actively participates in state affairs.*

Key Words: Women Empowerment, Human Rights, Women Rights, 1973 Constitution

Introduction

The last two decades witnessed the globalization of the phenomenon of women empowerment. Meetings, seminars, dialogues and workshops related to socio-political development also focused on women's empowerment. The issues of child welfare, infant mortality, demographic transition, political participation of women and their involvement in economic activities are frequently discussed nowadays. In this connection, the role of international organizations like the World Bank and United Nations cannot be ignored which consistently over the last two decades internationalized the issue of women empowerment. Pakistan is a developing country and other regional countries is a typical example of patriarchal societies. In such societies where males are dominant in every decision, women rarely find a chance to participate in activities, especially political activities. For women to be recognized as independent actors in the political arena is not an easy job. Pakistan's political history is evidence of such a phenomenon where women's representation was very low during various governments whether political or non-political. Considering the women as lower in status is the main cause of their less participation in political

participation. Furthermore, discriminatory laws are also one of the most important factors behind women's less interest in public activities. Various governments in Pakistan took steps to enhance the political participation of women however the credit goes to a military government that raised considerable seats for women in National and Provincial Assemblies. It was the period of Pakistani history when women actively took part in politics. Some of the prominent female politicians even contested general elections and managed the win their seats.

Research Objectives

- To emphasise women empowerment
- To explore the women's role in politics
- To analyze the women's political participation arrangements made by political parties from 1947 to 2008

Research Questions

- Why do women need to participate in practical politics?
- To what extent women can empower themselves by taking part in politics?

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- What arrangements were introduced by the major political parties for women empowerment in Pakistan from 1947 to 2008?

Methodology

The qualitative research method with an exploratory approach was adopted to find out the answers to the research questions.

Origin of the Concept

Various scholars defined the term empowerment and women empowerment in different ways. The word empower is defined in the dictionary as “to give somebody the power or authority to do something or to give somebody more control over their life or the situation they are in.” the central theme of empowering is the word “power”. Rowlands devised the four categories of power i.e “power within”, “power with”, “power to” and “power over”. According to him the first form ‘power within’ means “self-esteem” and awareness while ‘power with’ means the collective consciousness. ‘Power to’ means capacity building and ‘power over’ signifies the phenomenon of the clash between powerful and powerless fractions of the society (Rowlands, J. 1997). Some others explored the other dimension of the word “empower”. According to these scholars the word “empower” means the ability to make choices like choices of marriage, mobility, number of children, entertainment, job and quality of life. Kabeer belongs to this group of scholars and defined the term empowerment as “expansion in people’s ability to make strategic life choices in the context where this ability was previously denied”. (Kabeer, 2001) For the attainment of these choices, she suggested three interrelated dimensions and those are “resources, achievement and agency”. According to her resources means the conditions under which a person make her or his choices. She further categorized the “resource” into two the first type is material resources like property, land etc while the second type of resource is non-material like relationships, rules, networks etc. “agency” is the second dimension of empowerment according to her and by this, she means the process.

The process is the skill through which a person can set the goals of life, motivate someone or efforts to achieve their goals. The combination of the first two dimensions makes choices achievable. The third and last dimension is “achievement” and is refers to potential shaped by previous dimensions. If a person fails to realize his potential it can lead to incompetence and disempowerment.

Bennett used the term social inclusion with empowerment. According to him, empowerment

means “enrichment of assets and capabilities,” and social inclusion refers to as “removal of institutional barriers and enhancement of incentives for access to assets and development opportunity”. (Bennett, 2002) He further argues that all the definitions and routes to elaborate the concept of women’s empowerment almost are the same. However, it is important to note that the study of these frameworks that defined the concept of women’s empowerment can provide the guidelines for a deep understanding. Furthermore, the philosophical roots can also be explored by studying these frameworks. Summarily we can say that the term empowerment basically refers to the development of confidence in an individual or group. The birth of confidence can lead to competency, strength and collectivity.

Dyson and Moore explain the term women empowerment as “the capacity to obtain information and make a decision about one’s private concern and those of one’s intimates”. (Dyson & Moore 1983) While Dixon-Mueller defined “empowerment” as a “degree of access to and control over material and social resources within the family”. (Mueller 1978) Moreover, (Baltiwala, 1995) and (Malhotra 2002) viewed empowerment as “a process of gaining and controlling of material and intellectual resources which will support them to develop their self-sufficiency and enable them to achieve their independent rights and thereby challenging the ideology of patriarchy and speaking for the gender-based discrimination”.

This potential will help them to organize for acquiring authority. This authority would further lead them to make decisions, choices and finally showed them the way to eliminate their subordination in all fields of life. In this connection, the definition provided by the World Bank is very interesting defined empowerment as “the process of increasing capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform these choices into desired actions and outcomes” (WHO2006).

The definition mentioned above is basically related to women’s authority to choose their own path in the shape of making decisions that suit them. The utilization of material and intellectual resources for their betterment is their sole right.

Women in Pakistan

Pakistan is a Muslim country and came into being in the name of Islam. Like all Muslim countries and developing, nations patriarchy is the dominant system in the country where the major fraction of society is dominated by males. Males have the dominant position in the family and society and it is therefore restricted the women’s freedom of movement. The majority of the women in Pakistani

society are limited to households. Their major job is to bear and rear the children and the service of the elders of the family. Like all the other developing nations women have fewer participations in the field of politics, economy and social activities. Their less education, fewer job opportunities, poor health

conditions and fewer opportunities to invest added to the vulnerability of the women in Pakistan. Public meetings, political participation, and decision making are the other important areas where women's participation is very rare in the country (Tisdell 2002).

Table 1. Gender Gap in Education, Labor Force Participation, and Political Participation

| Gender Gap | Male | Female | Gap | Rank in the World |
|---------------------------------|------|--------|-----|-------------------------------|
| Literacy Rate | 67% | 42% | 25% | 122 out 134 countries |
| Population ever attended School | 69% | 44% | 25% | *GGI index |
| Labor Force Participation | 70% | 19% | 51% | 127 out of 128 countries *GCI |
| Political Participation | | | | |
| National Assembly | 79% | 21% | 58% | 50 out of 134 countries |
| Senate | 82% | 18% | 64% | GGI index |

Source: The Global Gender Gap Report. Geneva: World Economic Forum, 2008. *GGI=Global Gender Gap *GCI=Gender Competitiveness Index

The above table shows the condition of women in Pakistan. Their literacy rate, labour force and political participation clearly indicated that women are relatively at a lower level than men. A person is called literate when he or she can read or write in Pakistan. The overall situation of literacy is not very good in the country and it is only 53% literacy rate in Pakistan. It included those individuals as well who can read a newspaper and write their names. Furthermore, the difference in the literacy rate between men and women is quite big. 42% of women are literate above the age of 10 while 67% of men are literate above the age of 10, showing the fact that women have fewer facilities for education in the country due to the male-dominated society. The Global Gender-gap index also mentioned the relative gender gap in education in Pakistan. The index ranked the 134 countries in the world and Pakistan stands at rank 122 (Tyson & Zahidi 2008). Furthermore, Pakistan is the country where women's participation in the labour force is the lowest. Only 19% of women participated in the labour force which is quite low than men and resultantly added to their lower economic status and increased dependency on males.

The statistics above clearly indicated that women's status is quite alarming in the areas of education and labour force while in political participation the women are enjoying relatively better status. The problems of women are not only limited to these three indicators only. Other areas are too there where women are marginalized because of their gender. Women in Pakistan have fewer opportunities to acquire land or property in their name. Most women are dispossessed of inheritance. Brothers and husbands usually do not give their

rights of inheritance. Women are restricted to households only and therefore their freedom of movement is limited. There are some other issues too halted the status of women in Pakistan like sexual harassment, harassment in the workplace, fewer opportunities for jobs, less role in decision making, a diet deficiency, and risky child delivery. The discussion and statistics mentioned above clearly indicated that women are facing crises of identity all over the world and especially in the developing world.

Post-Independence Women's Role in Politics

Pakistan struggled a lot during the early years for survival. The country was in the grip of economic chaos along with hostile enemies on the eastern and western borders. Incapable leadership after the death of Muhammad Ali Jinnah tried their best to move Pakistan out of the crisis but failed and engaged in the fulfilment of their vested interests. Meanwhile, when male politicians were busy in the achievement of their personal interests some women played their role in the politics of the country. One such big name was Miss Fatima Jinnah, the sister of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah. The lady remained an inspiration for the women in Pakistan and even today is a role model for the women politicians in the country. Fatima Jinnah's political contribution to this country is well known however her social services are also unforgettable. She established the Women's Relief Committee for the purpose of giving relief to the women who migrated from India to Pakistan (Shami 2016). The committee took care of the refugees and especially the women who were in poor conditions in various camps set up across the country. After Quaid's death, she actively took part in politics and on various occasions criticized the policies of the government regularly. She was of the opinion that Quaid's principles could only lead the country towards

prosperity. Pakistan faced extreme political instability during the early years when the country from 1947 to 1958 witnessed seven prime ministers. No government was able to complete its tenure and the civil-military bureaucracy nexus further aggravated the situation. The country witnessed the first Martial Law in 1958 when Ayub Khan took over the country. The new regime introduced a presidential form of government in the country in 1962 and announced the holding of elections in the country. In 1964, after the death of Khuwaja Nazimuddin, the opposition parties agreed to nominate Miss Fatima Jinnah as their presidential candidate [\(Yousaf 1980\)](#).

Ayub Khan enjoyed full power when Fatima Jinnah challenged his dominance in the political arena. Being the president of the country Ayub Khan was in full command of the situation with the support of many politicians. Fatima Jinnah not only challenged his position but also gave birth to the hope in the women that they can do if started believing in themselves. Being a sister of Quaid, she electrified the whole nation. The nation has never seen the role of women as leaders before and hence this was the first step towards women's political empowerment in the country. Fatima Jinnah's participation in politics motivated not only the women in Pakistan but also in the regional countries well. It may be an interesting research question to find out whether Mrs. Indira Gandhi was inspired by Fatima Jinnah or not? Furthermore, her candidature for the head of the state put an end to the knotty question of women's right to become head of the state. JI, a right-wing Islamic political party fully supported Fatima Jinnah in the election. Miss Fatima Jinnah became a role model for women's political empowerment while at the same time two other prominent females who actively participated in the freedom movement were against Fatima Jinnah. Begum Raana Liaqat Ali Khan and Begum Fida Hussain opposed Fatima Jinnah and fully supported the military ruler Ayub Khan. Morally and politically it was the wrong move by these two ladies to support a person who came into power through illegal means but at the same time, if we analyzed the situation through the lens of women empowerment it was remarkable that women who played an active part in freedom movement are now taking an active part in the politics no matter whether opposing each other.

Apart from Miss Fatima Jinnah, there were other prominent women also who took an active part in politics. Two such determined ladies were Begum Shaista Kramullah and Begum Jahan Ara Shahnawaz who were members of the first constituent assembly in 1948. They were also role models for women in Pakistan by achieving their political success

[\(Shahnawaz 2002\)](#). Both the ladies worked tirelessly for the rights of women within and outside the assembly and managed to pass a bill "Muslim Personal Law of Shariah" under which women of Pakistan got the right of inheritance including property and agricultural land [\(Shami 2016\)](#). The law was fully effective in 1951, however, Pakistani society did not accept it as the majority of women are still denied the right of inheritance which is given to them not only by the law of the land but also by the Quran and Sunnah.

The issue of second marriage is quite debatable in many civilizations. Many countries did not practice and allow second marriage. In the case of Islamic civilization, however, the issue is entirely different as Muslim men are allowed to have four wives at a time but with the condition of justice among them. Modern societies raised serious questions over the issue and Pakistan society is not an exception. A liberal fraction of the society is entirely against polygamy, however many people in Pakistan have more than one wife. In 1955 the prime minister of Pakistan Muhammad Ali Bogra married for the second time [\(Afzal, 1999\)](#). The women organizations that worked for women's rights started a campaign against this action of the PM [\(Afzal 1999\)](#). The "United Front for Women's Rights (UFWR)" under the direction of Begum Jahan Ara Shahnawaz was formed to protest against these kinds of activities. The government under extreme pressure from organizations like APWA and UFWR formed a commission whose head was Chief Justice of Pakistan Justice Rashid. The main objective of forming this commission was to "study the existing laws of marriage, divorce and custody of children and to bring them in conformity with Islamic principles" [\(Mumtaz & Shaheed 1987\)](#).

The commission prepared a detailed report with dissenting notes from a religious member of the commission Maulana Ehtashamul Haq Thanvi [\(Shami 2016\)](#). The report was not utilized under the pressure of orthodox religious elements [\(Shami 2016\)](#) However, the commission's report formed the basis for Muslim Family Laws Ordinance 1961, five years later [\(Shami 2016\)](#).

The landmark step towards the political empowerment of women was the introduction of the rule of female suffrage for the seats reserved for females allocated on the basis of special territorial constituencies in the constitution of 1956. The step was remarkable as the women got dual voting rights i.e. one for general seats and one for women's reserved seats. However, the potential and utility of this step that empowered women politically were not grasped by the framers of the constitution in the coming years. The constitution of 1962 replaced this

with an indirect voting system according to which women were allocated few reserved seats [\[Shami 2016\]](#). In this system, the party boss was to nominate the women for reserved seats and the party had no other option except to vote for nominated women in the parliament. It means that women lost their constituencies i.e. women of Pakistan. The women of Pakistan became “token representatives” [\[Mehmood 1990\]](#). The constitution of 1973 was also maintained this system [\[Burki 1980\]](#).

Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's Era

By the end of 1960s Ayub Khan's downfall started and protests and rallies started against him. He had no other option but to resign from his post. He illegally transferred the power to then army chief General Yahya Khan in 1969. General Yahya Khan imposed Martial Law in the country and suspended the constitution. In 1970 general elections were held in the country in which the Awami League under the leadership of Sheik Mujeeb managed to get a majority. Bhutto's refusal to accept his victory led to the dismemberment of the country in 1971. East Pakistan became Bangladesh and Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto assumed power in western Pakistan. during the election campaign Bhutto's famous slogan “Roti, Kapra or Makan” fascinated many women and they started believing that they would soon be considered dignified human beings in society [\[Mumtaz & Shaheed 1987\]](#). It was for the first time in history that females voted for their own desired candidates irrespective of their husband's choices. This was a big movement for the women in Pakistan that they voted for the candidates of their own interest and an example of women empowerment at a grass-root level [\[Mumtaz & Shaheed 1987\]](#).

After coming to power the foremost challenge to Bhutto was the framing of the constitution. Begum Nasim Jahan and Begum Ashraf Abbasi were included in the committee that was formulated for the framing of the new constitution. These two ladies performed the same role as played by Begum Jahan Ara and Begum Shaista in the constitution of 1956 [\[Mehmood 1990\]](#). The efforts of these two ladies brought many reforms for women in the constitution of 1973. Greater gender equality, equal status of all citizens before the law irrespective of their gender, cast religion and sex and the appointment in civil services were the contributions of these two ladies. It was further guaranteed that initiatives would be taken to enhance women's participation in all corners of life. Resultantly women got the chance to enter into superior services like CSP and foreign services [\[Shami 2016\]](#).

Zia-ul-Haq's Era

Bhutto's era was ended in an unconventional way when Zia overthrew his government and imposed martial law in the country once again. On assuming power he promised the holding elections in 90 days and the promise was never materialized. Zia's period saw less participation of women in all the social, economical and political spheres. Prominent women politicians like Benazir Bhutto and Begum Nusrat Bhutto were forced to leave the country. The ban was not only limited to political activities in the country rather journalists also became the victim of Zia's oppressive policies. It was the introduction of the Hudood Ordinance when a class of educated women came out on roads to protest against such a law and declared it as un-Islamic and a step against women's empowerment. The ordinance, on one hand, reduced the legal status of women and the other hand tyrannized the women by the wrong interpretation of the Zina Ordinance.

Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif Eras 1988 to 1999

Women empowerment was witnessed in Benazir and Nawaz eras but due to political turmoil, the process remained slow. The rising contribution of women in political parties up to now had no escort to a noteworthy number of female appointees in key positions within the parties. The lack of political parties' intra elections leaders generally suggests party campaigners on party positions. So the Women fail to get a rank within parties. Women's presence in central executive bodies of PPP and PML-N was negligible. There are only five women in the political history of Pakistan such as “Fatima Jinnah (PML), Banazir Bhutto (PPP), Nusrat Bhutto (PPP), Ginwa Butto and Nasim Wali Khan” who served as leaders in their parties but unfortunately, they got it by their families, not by opportunities. However, the membership of women's wings is much smaller than the male members of the party. In 1997, only 31 women were the part of National Assembly and 09 were independents candidates. The PPP granted tickets to only 9 women and PML offered to 9, PML Junjo Group 7, ANP only 1, Khaksar Tehreek 1. About 18 women compete for regional assemblies wherein “Punjab 7, Sindh 6, NWFP 4, and Balochistan 1”. Among these 10 were independent candidates whilst 11 had party tickets. In the 1988 general elections, women's seats remained the same as were in 1985. But it terminated in 1990. During 1947 and 1997 only 113 females were elected. In the 1988 general elections, four women won National Assembly seats. This proportion turned down in 1990 to 1 % and

amplified yet again to 2% in the 1993 general elections [Sarwat 2014].

Table 2. Gender Equilibrium at the Bar, 1994–1997

| Year | Bar Association | Total | Female | Percent |
|------|-------------------------|-------|--------|---------|
| 1997 | Supreme Court | 456 | 7 | 1 |
| 1995 | NWFP Bar Council | 6750 | 112 | 2 |
| 1995 | Punjab Bar Council | 27000 | 271 | 1 |
| 1995 | Sukkur Division | 663 | 11 | 2 |
| 1995 | Larkana Division | 477 | 4 | 1 |
| 1995 | Hyderabad Division | 1,111 | 59 | 5 |
| 1995 | Mirpur khas Division | 265 | 1 | .4 |
| 1995 | Karachi Bar Association | 2080 | 262 | 13.6 |
| 1994 | Balochistan Bar Council | 350 | 6 | 2 |

Source: TA PAK 3433: Strengthening of institutional capacity for legal and judicial reform, for \$2,900,000, Approved of 27 April 2000.

Musharraf Era

General Pervaiz Musharraf came in October 1999 by replacing the elected government of Nawaz Sharif. He became the chief executive of the country and announced his famous seven-point agenda. The international and domestic compulsion restrained them from fulfilling his seven-point agenda. By nature, he was liberal and progressive-minded and declared Mustafa Kamal Atatürk as his ideal. Unlike his predecessor Zia, he brought numerous transformations in the domestic political system like the political empowerment of women in the country. It was for the first time in the history of Pakistan that women's representation was increased in the parliament, provincial assemblies and at the local government level. However, the genuine demand of women's organizations of restoring the rule of female suffrage was not implemented as was practised in the constitution of 1956. According to this, a female can vote for female candidates only. The result of ignoring female suffrage surfaced in the shape of a mere puppet show where women were at the disposal of party leaders. Musharraf's government took a bold step by increasing the number of reserved seats for women in the election 2002 by 20% in the parliament including provincial assemblies. The increase of women's reserve seats was not only limited to national and provincial levels but also 33% of seats reserved for them in the local government system.

Pakistan is a multi-lingual and multi-ethnic country where various ethnicities residing having

different culture, and norms. The traditional cultural values in the province of KPK and Baluchistan and especially those areas which are the strong hold of religious political parties, usually does not allow women to vote. Exactly this was happened in the elections of 2002 when nearly 31% female voters in the KPK and Baluchistan were not allowed to vote by their male members of the family. Had Musharraf been included the female suffrage in LFO, the religious parties and tradition Pashtuns and Baloch would have been brought their female family members to vote for their female candidates in the parliament. And if they had failed to comply with this the women seats would have been gone to the rival parties. This would also "have had the advantage of making candidates for the reserved women's seats accountable to their women voters, thus forcing the candidates to devise political agendas conducive to resolving women's problems and helping them to achieve their due rights". In other words, "women's demands would have been presented and fought for in the assemblies by women parliamentarians, who would have had to demonstrate their dedication and record on women issues as an essential requirement for seeking re-election". This would have been in "stark contrast to the position that has persisted ever since the abrogation of the 1956 Constitution, whereby women parliamentarians have been beholden to their party leaders, who have virtually "nominated" them for occupying the reserved women, seats".

Table 3. Representation of women in pakistan's legislatures

| Legislatures | Total | Women Elected Directly | Women Seats | Percentage |
|--------------|-------|------------------------|-------------|------------|
| 1947 - 54 | 30 | - | 2 | 6.7% |
| 1955 - 58 | 80 | - | - | 0% |
| 1962 - 65 | 156 | 6 | - | 3.8% |

| | | | | |
|----------------------|-----|----|----|--------|
| 1965 - 69 | 156 | 6 | - | 3.8% |
| 1972 - 77 | 144 | 6 | - | 4.2% |
| May 1977 - July 1977 | 210 | 1 | 10 | 5.2% |
| 1985 - 88 | 217 | 1 | 21 | 10.1% |
| 1988 - 90 | 217 | 4 | 20 | 11.1% |
| 1990 - 93 | 217 | 2 | - | .9% |
| 1993 - 96 | 217 | 4 | - | 1.8% |
| 1997 - 99 | 217 | 6 | - | 2.8% |
| 2002 - to date | 342 | 13 | 61 | 21.64% |

Sources: <http://www.pildat.org/publications/bgpaper-women.rep.pdf>, (Accessed on 20th Dec2018)

General Musharraf did a great effort for women's participation in the right direction. It made it possible for women to increase their strength from 2% to 20% in legislature along with 33% representation at local government bodies like union council and Tehsil. Furthermore, women were appointed as ambassadors in many countries.

Conclusion

The history of women's rights and empowerment remained complex in Pakistan with little effort to ensure women's rights. Muhammad Ali Jinnah always welcomed women in politics, Begum Jahan Ara and Fatima Jinnah were the prominent women of that era. From 1947 to General Pervaiz Musharraf numerous issues brought women's rights and condensed by the General Zia-ul-Haq policies. A notable change was witnessed in 2006 through a

revision to the "Hudood Laws", the result appeared in the safety of Women Act. Benazir Bhutto became the first Muslim Primer of Pakistan on December 2; 1988. The Pakistan People's Party government also made legislation for women's empowerment and the same did by General Musharraf's power. Despite major advancements and new legislation, the challenges for implementation were a key issue. Pakistan still ranked second lowest in the globe for gender inequality, ranking at 148 out of 149 world countries. Women are struggling to be a part of greater practical political and fiscal equality. Women empowerment is still a menace in Pakistan where political parties in past and still using it as a slogan but after winning elections arrangements were visible in execution despite all, General Musharraf and the Peoples party era were quite welcoming for women. However, Pakistan needs more sound policies for women's empowerment through political reforms and practices.

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