

## Role of Pakhtun Women in Politics: A Case Study of Begum Zari Sarfaraz

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### Abstract

*An effort has been made to revisit the political participation of Pakhtun women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa former NWFP. The active role in the politics of Pakhtun women was quite difficult due to socio-cultural constraints. In such circumstances a woman from the elite class emerged on the political scene of NWFP; Begum Zari Sarfaraz who not only participated in the independence movement of Pakistan but also participated in politics after the creation of Pakistan and had rendered great services for women folk as members of national and provincial assemblies. The paper shed light on her opposition to One Unit. The paper also investigates the reason that why she quit politics. There is hardly any literature on the role of Begum Zari Sarfaraz in the politics of Pakistan.*

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### Introduction

The womenfolk of Pakhtun society in KP (N.W.F.P) have lagged much behind in political and social fields. While keeping in view the backwardness of the Frontier province in many walks of life including education, it was very difficult to send their daughters for education outside of the province. However, there were some elite families had the privilege to send their daughters for modern education to Punjab or other provinces. Thus, like Frontier Muslim League, the Frontier women Muslim Leaguers were also from elite families. The under discussion Pakhtun woman Begum Zari Sarfaraz had also born on July 28, 1923, in the elite family of Mardan. Mardan is the second-largest city after Peshawar in KP. Zari was first coached privately and then admitted to Presentation Convent School Sari Nagar, wherefrom she did her matriculation. Afterwards, she had passed B. An Honors exams, with distinctive marks, in Pashto and Urdu from the Punjab University. After completing her education in Lahore, she came back to the province and despite discouraging conditions and social restrictions had taken an active part in politics. In the 1940s, she joined the Frontier women Muslim League and actively

participated in the Pakistan movement.

She was known in N.W.F.P. as a respectable female politician and a sympathetic female social leader. In Mardan, she was known as *Bibe Gul*. Aziz Javed in his book has named her “*khatoon – e-Sarhad*”. Mardan is the headquarter of the *Yousufzai* tribe. Begum Zari Sarfaraz hails from “*Allah Dad khail*”, a famous branch of the tribe. The *Khail* is known in Pashto history as “*Kashran Za*”. Her pedigree from her mother’s side joins a close relative of Afghan rural Ameer Dost Muhammad khan. Her ancestors have displayed great feats of chivalry and generosity. Her family was known not only for bravely, sacrifice and love of land and nation but also for tops the list of promoters of learning and literature.

### Her Active Participation in Politics

The first branch of the women Muslim League in NWFP was established in April 1939. Begum Mufti Abdul Wadood and Qanitha Bibi became President and Vice President respectively ([Khyber Mail, 1939](#)). But on the whole, the branch was remained inactive for a long time. However, the Women Muslim Leaguer in NWFP came to the forefront in the 1945-46 elections. In

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October 1945, the All India Muslim League had sent a delegation under Lady Abdullah Haroon, President of the All India Women Muslim League. The delegation had reached Peshawar on October 16, 1945. At Peshawar, they were received at the station by Sardar Aurangzeb Khah, Abdul Rab Nashtar and several women ([Khyber Mail 1945](#)). On the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>, two mass meetings were held and collected Rs.1500/for the election fund. The delegation had left Peshawar on the 20<sup>th</sup> for Mardan. They were received at the Nowshera Station by Khanzadi Zari Sarfaraz and were taken to Mardan, where arrangements were made for women public meeting at the residence of Begum Sarfaraz Khan. The gathering consisted of nearly 4000 women representing the various Afghan clans. This was for the first time in the history of the N.W.F.P that such a large women meeting has been held. An address was read by Khanzadi Zari Sarfaraz on behalf of the women of the NWFP, welcoming the delegation, offering them full support to the Muslim League and placing their confidence in the leadership of Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah. Lady Haroon in reply thanked them for their hospitality and congratulated the Khanzadi in organizing the Pathan women and bringing them under the banner of the Muslim League. At the conclusion of the meeting, the foundation of the women (Zanana) Muslim League was laid down ([The Daily DAWN, 1945](#)). Zari Sarfaraz and her mother Kokab Sultana were respectively elected as General Secretary and President of the Muslim League Mardan branch. From this meeting, she had activated in practical politics and continued her efforts for the creation of Pakistan ([Javed, A. 1968](#)).

After the creation of Pakistan, in April 1948, Quaid-e-Azam visited NWFP. Zari Sarfaraz as a member of a representative delegation of the women demanded of Quaid-e-Azam at Governor House to grant representation in the Assemblies to women from Frontier. The Quaid-e-Azam said on this occasion, "Your sacrifices and selfless services entitle you to demand representation in the Constituent Assembly". It was also demanded of Fatima Jinnah to help in sanction of a degree college at Peshawar so that; girl students of the region could adorn themselves with education. Both the demands were accepted at which the people and womenfolk of Frontier expressed extreme joy. It is not baseless to say that her efforts had a great say in earning representation for women from Frontier in the

Constituent Assembly and in the establishment of Frontier College for women at Peshawar ([Javed, A. 1968](#)).

### **Role as Woman Legislature**

On March 19, 1951, the Governor-General of Pakistan announced the holding of elections in Pakistan. It was for the first time in NWFP that two seats had been reserved for Frontier women. The purpose was to enable Frontier women to participate in national politics and reconstruction. Among the two women seats, one was for Peshawar city and cantonment and the other was to represent the rest of the cities and cantonment of NWFP jointly. In these elections, a Muslim league ticket was given on insistence by the Frontier women to Begum Zari Sarfaraz and she was elected unopposed ([Javed, A. 1975](#)).

She said in an interview to the "Daily Mashriq" "I did not take part in politics for personal gains. I was of the view not to go to the assembly personally. I wanted to dictate those who went to assembly to do this or that in the assembly and myself sitting outside it. I was of the view that the party should be strong, in a position to dictate its members and ministers and able to ask the Chief Ministers and premier regarding their performance. As such the party will have an upper hand over them. I wanted to remain at the party and not to go to the assembly but my friends compelled me to go there and work. I wrote to Khan Abdul Qayyum Khan that if give me the Muslim League ticket well and good otherwise the matter must be kept secret. I promised to the support that soever he gave the ticket provided that he would disclose to nobody that ticket had been given instead of me to somebody else. He gave the ticket to me and I was elected unopposed in elections 1952. This was so because the constituency comprising of fifteen districts and nobody was prepared to contest elections in such large area" [Aziz Javed](#).

Through becoming a member of the assembly Zari Sarfaraz bought no reputation nor other temptation. It was only in accordance with the desire of the notable lady rendered some significant service for the welfare of the area and the womenfolk. It was the spirit of public service that compelled her to go to the assembly and do the maximum possible service to the nation and the country. This was why after returning to the assembly unopposed the pattern of her people

representation was really unforgettable ([The Daily Mashriq 1996](#)). In her representative capacity, she demanded of the government to establish female hospitals, dispensaries and health centres. In response to her efforts magnificent buildings for female hospitals at Mardan, Government High school at Haripur, Hazara and Charsadda were erected. For changing the Govt Girls High school Mardan into a capacious building, she spent out of her purse. It was customary that transfer of property took place without giving due share to the females. This resulted in the deprivation of the females of their rights forever. She tabled a resolution in the assembly seeking non-transference of property unless the females were also given their due share in the property. The govt. conceded to the demand and later gave it a legal shape ([The Daily Shahbaz 1952](#)). Similarly in NWFP children of the rich went to the schools in a fine dress which created feelings of inferiority among the children of the poor. She demanded in the assembly that an identical uniform should be fixed for all the students so that the students were kept firm feelings of poverty and richness and the poor students are saved from falling victims to inferiority complex for, it is a big blockade in growth and development of intellectual facilities of a student. The Education minister accepted the demand. The same uniform was fixed for male and female students. Thus the young generation was saved from inferiority complex ([Aziz Javed](#)). For moral elevation of the children, she moved a demand in the assembly wherein the ban was sought on children below 16 years of age to go to the cinema. She contended that the children instead of learning moral lessons from the films suffered moral deterioration at its hand. Similarly, in March 1952 she demanded in Provincial Assembly opening up of more educational institutions so as to adorn the Frontier women with education. Handicraft centers were demanded training in crafts and promotion of cottage industry 11. ([The Daily Pakistan Times 1953](#)). The attention of the Provincial Assembly was also drawn to the fact that there existed only one Lady Reading Hospital for women of NWFP and it created great hardships for the ill females. There existed no satisfactory ambulance arrangement. It was demanded by her in the Assembly that female hospitals and centers ought to be opened up everywhere so that needs have all females of

Frontier were met([The Daily The Rehbar-I-Sarhad 1953](#)).

All the aforesaid demands made by her were accepted. While performing her role as people's representative in the assembly she did not forget even the imprisoned women. Therefore she put forth the demand in the assembly that such reforms be introduced regarding the captive women in jails that they are able to become useful members of the society after release from captivity ([Aziz Javed](#)). For women jails she also suggested that lectures on character building should be given to female prisoners, she also drew the attention of the Government to the fact that there was a great deal of injustice done to the female when the law of inheritance was affected ([The Daily, Pakistan Times Lahore 1952](#)). Not only she fulfilled her duty inside the assembly but she also always laid stress on the enhancement of the standard of living of females and proper training of the children. She struggled for female rights.

The cattle used to be slaughtered without any check. Realizing the danger of extinction of the cattle she put a demand in the assembly that slaughter of cattle be prohibited once a week so that survival of the cattle is ensured. The Government accepted the demand. Had such farsightedness not been employed, satisfactory arrangement for the survival of the cattle would have been impossible.

She is full of spirit for the struggle she does not believe merely in resolutions. She was a practical lady and believes in action. In her address to the Sarhad Muslim League convention in December, 1952 she said, "The women Muslim League will in no way lag behind the men to help about Kashmir problem in any possible way. If needed, the women will take part in the war alongside the men." She elaborated in her speech; "It is necessary to sacrifice life and property and each charitable object for independence. The Kashmir problem will not be solved with the passage of the resolution. Take courage and be sure that women of today will follow the footprints of the brave and revered ladies who took part in, "Badar" and "Uhad" along with men" ([The Daily, Shahbaz, Peshawar 1952](#)).

On January 11, 1952, the Frontier Legislative Assembly passed a resolution of condolence on the death of Mr. Liaquat Ali Khan, when it reassembled after the address of the Governor to the House. The resolution, which was moved by

the leader of the house, Khan Abdul Qayyum Khan, placed on record the deep sense of sorrow of the House at the untimely death of Mr. Liaquat Ali Khan, the late Prime Minister of Pakistan. Speaking on the resolution, Zari Sarfaraz paid tributes to Mr. Liaquat Ali Khan on behalf of the women of the Frontier for whom, he had done so much. She said Mr. Liaquat Ali Khan always tried for the rights of women and was a great source of inspiration for the women of the country. She also thanked Begum Liaquat Ali Khan for having rendered great service to the cause of women in Pakistan under the guidance of her illustrious husband ([The Daily, Pakistan Times Lahore 1952](#)).

### **Her Opposition to One Unit**

The Constituent Assembly of Pakistan passed the One-Unit bill on September 30, 1955. Votes for the One-Unit were 43 and against were only 13. Zari Sarfaraz was among those who voted against One Unit. In an interview with the "Daily Mashriq", she said, "The day the resolution supporting One Unit was passed I opposed it. The record bears testimony to it and files of the "Pakistan times" are full of it. I considered it harmful for my province. I was about to resign. I suggested to the other fellow lady member to resign jointly because when the resolution was brought before the house nobody was allowed to speak. Only the Chief Minister spoke on the occasion. I was not willing to accept it. To my suggestion, the other lady members expressed her inability saying that she was not an independent member. I consulted my well-wishers. They forbade me to become a target. They were of the view that my single resignation was inconsequential. They advised me to hold a press conference, which I did and made my opposition to the One-Unit public. Since then till the dismemberment of the One-Unit, I opposed it wholeheartedly irrespective of my presence on treasury or opposition benches. In West Pakistan. Assembly my leaders Sardar Bahadur Khan and Daulatana When One Unit resolution up for vote I told them about my intention to vote against it. I sought their permission or my resignation from the party. They knew me as a strong-headed person whose single vote against the combined vote of the treasury and opposition in support was insignificant. I cast my vote against G.M Sayyed and his men were eleven. Mine was the 12<sup>th</sup> vote. We have caste it against One Unit. These made no difference. They won. I, anyhow,

had adopted the principle stand" ([The Daily, Mashriq Peshawar 1996](#)). After One Unit when the issue of Capital unit arose then too Zari Sarfaraz performed her vital role for the betterment of her province.

After West Pakistan, she remained a member of the West Pakistan Assembly up till 1958. Members to the Assembly were not to be elected on the basis of adult franchise. The Electoral College for them comprised of the members of the ex-assemblies. They cast votes in favor of the assembly members of their choice ([The Daily, Khyber Mail, Peshawar, 1955](#)). Begum Zari Sarfaraz in an interview with the "Daily Mashriq" said "our earlier election to NWFP Assembly was with Women, not men, votes. On the occasion of the 1952 election Frontier Assemblywomen, voters were given each two-ballot papers. The one was used in the election (it male candidates and the other, after few days; was used in the election of female candidates Thus I was elected through the female, not male vote presently we were elected to this assembly. We were two ladies elected to West Pakistan Assembly. We remained its members up till the imposition of Martial Law" Aziz Javed.

Begum Zari Sarfaraz once again got elected in 1962 as a member of the National Assembly with an overwhelming majority. In an interview with the "Daily Mashriq", she said "in elections 1962 we were elected by the members of the provincial assembly. They elected female members both to the National and Provincial assemblies: I became a member of the National assembly. At that time the One-Unit prevailed. My constituency stretched from Gujrat to Hazara, Swat, Dir and tribal areas. Ten votes were from the Punjab and 36 were from Sarhad. This was our pattern of the election. During the 1965 election, the MNAs from Sarhad voted me to the National Assembly and the MNAs from Punjab. Sind and Balochistan each area voted one lady to the National Assembly. An amendment was being brought in the 1962 constitution. then Khurshid Ahmad was Law Minister I told him about myself not taking part in the voting To this question I told him that if the method of election was to be amended the method of election of females also needed Change which they had not included. I, therefore, expressed my inability to vote for the adoption of the law All the MNAs strive to win my support. They begged of me as the time was running out. Sheikh Khurshid Ahmad asked me to vote the law and promised



me to include my desired amendment in it later on. On it I asked him to form a committee that will think over the procedure for the time being, until the females become entitled to contest general elections, we shall have to do something. He included the amendment and announced it on the assembly floor. It occurred for the first time in our history that a member from the opposition stood up and declared that the opposition would not vote against the amendment because it had been sponsored, besides announcing my name by Zari Sarfaraz, a member from East Pakistan had said so and nobody opposed. All were astonished and asked about the spell that I had cast over them. I brushed aside the impression and said, "I considered them as human beings while you consider them to be untouchables. I sit with them. I learn from them. I talk to them and extend respect to them. For in democracy opposition is indispensable. I believe that democracy cannot survive without opposition. When we were all eighty-two members in the Sarhad assembly including two females, there were four male Opposition members. Whenever they spoke in the assembly all our members stood up in objection and made noise. I questioned this behavior in party meetings I asked to be told the logic when they were unable even to move adjournment motion, if allowed to speak they will be able to give vent to their feelings. But alas: the politicians in Pakistan are narrow-minded and are not liberal. We have never tolerated the opposition. In this respect all the Govt are alike. I have remained with the Govt: as well as with the opposition. During One Unit when Muslim League was in opposition I remained in opposition till last. Many a time I was offered ministry, which I rejected by saying that after entry to politics I have been taught not to run after ministry but after principles, I shall be where there are principles, as I cannot part with principles. In 1962 when I was elected to the assembly, news correspondents came to me and through questions impressed upon me that I was giving harm to the future of my brother. Their hint was towards Mir Afzal Khan. In response to my question they said that he could become a minister but for my opposition to One Unit. I said who wanted the lad of Yesterday to become a minister" He that had been elected shortly before so that the committed mistakes was shown with shoes and made to run away? I said the time was not far for his becoming a minister but what was

needed first was that he learnt. I did not want him to become a minister then. He was not to run after ministry. It was the other way round. Then he was a member of the West Pakistan Assembly. I told them I did not want to harm his future. But I could not tolerate a scheme that was harmful to my province (The Daily Mashrtiq)

She had rendered laudable services as an important member on several standing committees in the National Assembly. After becoming a member of the national assembly, she had done a lot of work for women and presented many demands for the rights of women (Aziz Javed) In the National assembly, she demanded that the basis of our foreign policy should not be conditioned by any power and added that the present Government had given a new look to our foreign policy. She demanded that the reluctance of the Indian leaders to solve the outstanding disputes, including Kashmir with Pakistan, had resulted in the recent conflict and added that present leaders of India were afraid to take any positive decision for the solution of the Kashmir dispute, because of the forthcoming general elections in that country early next year, But she was confident that ultimately the people of Jammu and Kashmir would one day be able to decide their future ([The Daily, Khyber Mail, Peshawar, 1955](#))

### Exit from Politics

In a special interview with the "Daily Mashrtiq", she said, "I remained in politics till I could continue it with principles. But when I felt by 1969 that the style and pattern of politics had changed I got aloof from Politics" In response to a question whether an individual, a group, a party or the nation as a whole was in her opinion, responsible for the decline of political democratic and social values of Pakistan, she said, "the mistakes are ours. We did not cast an eye on Pakistan's history, .once it was created. This would not be done because each person that rose to power longed for himself to be praised. But history is not made this way. History is comprised both of merits and shortcomings. It is up to the students afterwards to decide the good and evil person. If a historian is constrained to be all praise he cannot write history. The pen cannot be fettered when done so there is great suffocation. Similarly, if a politician is disallowed to express his Opinion he is unable to do so. It was, therefore, that I deserted politics. I thought

that I would not restraint my tongue. I am a frank person but the trend was that I would have been placed behind the bars for my frankness, which I could not afford then, with my hair turned grey. Moreover, I have a complaint against the Pakistani nation and people that they do not discriminate between Pakistani politicians. They cannot distinguish the politicians who do politics for national interests from those who do so for personal interests. This had given me a great shock. I do not want to blemish my spotless costume with dirty spots. It is useless to involve in it. Today politics is done for making one's self bank balance. These unprincipled politics made me leave it. I did not like to be buried under this din which cannot earn a person good name (Aziz Javed)

### **Conclusion**

Zari Sarfaraz was one of the few women who provided leadership to the women of NWFP during the Pakistan movement and especially in

the 1945-46 election, in Civil disobedience moment in the referendum which was held in NWFP. A woman like Zari Sarfaraz could not remain inactive after the creation of Pakistan. She decided to jump into the political arena on the insistence of women. However, her basic motivation to join politics was for social work and reforms. She remained a legislature at the provincial and the national level from 1952 to 1969 and had done a lot of work in this capacity. Begum Zari Sarfaraz has been very critical of the unprincipled politicians in the country. She exited from politics in 1969. She is not interested in politics because she feels the election is the business of money and there is no work in the assembly. She died on April 27, 2008, after a brief illness at the age of 83. She was buried at her family graveyard at Mardan. The services of Zari Sarfaraz in the Pakistan Movement and as a politician after the creation of Pakistan will be remembered as their meritorious achievements in the history of Pakistan.

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