

Women in Parliament in Pakistan: Problems and Potential Solutions

SAIRA BANO

Abstract

Since the inception of parliamentary form of government, women's political participation and representation in decision-making institutions has remained minimal irrespective of the fact that women constitute more than half of the world population today. With the passage of time there is an increased awareness that emergence of a gender-balanced society for addressing issues of status of women can only be realized by encouraging enhanced participation of women in decision and policy making institutions in general and politics and legislature in particular. In different regions of the world there are considerable variations in the political participation of women. This paper, with a focus on South Asia, analyzes the factors, which have contributed to the increasing number of women in legislatures in different regions of the world, and presents the case of Pakistan. The focus of this research is on the role of Pakistani women in the political arena. Throughout the history of Pakistan, the 2002 and present parliament has shown the maximum representation of women. The study observes how this numerical strength in parliament has contributed to the empowerment of Pakistani women and whether women are the 'subjects of change' or the 'agents of change' and if these changes are brought about by women themselves or being launched by some exogenous factors?

Introduction

Women face obstacles to their political participation all over the world. Socio-economic factors as well as existing structures are considered as barriers to their advancement. In 2008, the rate of female representation stood at 17.7% globally. This minimal representation shows that women have to cover a long distance for the ideal parity in politics. There is need of full and equal participation of women in policy making in order to promote gender fair government. Efforts are being made to increase women's participation through legislative measures like gender quotas which are being implemented at a remarkable rate all over the world.

Gender quotas are increasingly viewed as an important policy measure for boosting women's access to decision-making bodies. The basic purpose of a quota system is to recruit women into a political position in order to limit their isolation in politics. Quotas are applied as temporary measures until the barriers for women's political participation are removed. Many developing countries have legislated quotas at the national or sub-national level to ensure gender fair government while in many developed countries, political parties have voluntarily adopted some form of quotas. At the same time quotas raise serious question about the contribution of quotas to the political empowerment of women as quotas themselves do not remove all the barriers. It seems important that quotas rest on grass root mobilization of women and the active participation of women's organization.

In Pakistan, women's quotas have enlarged the component of women's status in post 9/11 political developments. This change is visible as the political power has passed from fathers to daughters instead of sons only. The significance of this study stems from the fact that women's political presence is influenced by domestic vis-à-vis global trends. The political uplift of women lacks an economic base and seems non-indigenous. Women are tolerated as long as they do not challenge their male colleagues- so while they are in parliament, they have little power to achieve change. This research intends to highlight that the engenderment of the

political system of Pakistan lacks a socio-political base, and therefore need to be indigenously developed. The numerical strength of women in legislation is not an indicator of quality but their impact and effectiveness makes a difference.

The status of women in Pakistan is heterogeneous owing to uneven socioeconomic development in the rural and urban region. Generally, women's situation vis-à-vis men is of systematic subordination. Men and women's activities are divided into outside and inside home. Therefore, women's mobility is restricted and controlled. Men are given better education to compete for resources outside the home. This situation has led to dependency of women and becomes the basis for male power in social, economic and political spheres.

Women do not have a role in the formulation of economic and social policies. Their exclusion from decision-making bodies does not provide them any opportunity to raise their concern or to promote their participation in politics. Governance systems in Pakistan are male dominated. It is imperative for women to claim their share of power to make decisions for political empowerment.

The constitution of Pakistan places no restrictions on women's participation in politics; nevertheless their presence in the political parties as well as in the political structure at the local, provincial and national level remains insignificant due to cultural and structural barriers. The General elections of 2002 saw an unprecedented increase in the number of reserved seats for women in the parliament of Pakistan. This paper will analyze the political participation of women in parliament and whether numerical strength has contributed to women's empowerment. It will cover the issues of women's participation and major concerns associated with the representation of women in legislature. There is a need to assess the impact of increased representation of women in the parliament and evaluate the female legislature's performance to derive lessons for the future.

Women in parliament

Ever since the days of Plato and Aristotle, women's role in society and their nature have been objects of speculation within philosophical, religious and political thought. The household, both in Athenian society and in the western agricultural society, was the economic nucleus of the communal structure and therefore the status of women had a given place in discussions about the nature of society. A woman was defined principally in relation to the family and she was seen as innately inferior to man. According to Aristotle, "With regard to the differences between the sexes, man is by nature superior and leading, woman inferior and led" (Jonasdottir, 1998).

With the growth of modern society and industrialization the family and the relationships between men and women were relegated to the private sphere and politics was defined with regard to the new, public sphere (Jonasdottir, 1998). With the passage of time women's suffrage started. The term women's suffrage is a social, economic and political reform movement aimed at extending suffrage - the right to vote - to women. New Zealand was the first to give women the right to vote. However when this happened in 1893 it was not a "country", in the sense of being an independent nation state, but a mostly self-governing colony. The first women's suffrage was granted in New Jersey by the state constitution of 1776. Finland was the first European country to introduce women's suffrage in 1906, Norway in 1913, Canada in 1917, German and Poland in 1918, America in 1920 and Turkey in 1926.

As modern ideas of women's liberation are being articulated ever more clearly, there is a strong realization that since women constitute slightly more than half of the world population, and their contribution to the societal and economic development of societies is also more than

half as compared to that of men by virtue of their dual roles in the productive and reproductive spheres. Yet their participation in formal political structures and processes, where decisions regarding the use of societal resources generated by both men and women are made, remains insignificant (Bari, 2005). With increasing recognition among the international community of women's historic exclusion from structures of power, a global commitment has been made to redress gender imbalance in politics. Women's enhanced participation in governance structures is viewed as the key to redress gender inequalities in societies (Bari, 2005).

At the global level, the average percentage of women stands at 18.4%.

Representation of women in parliaments - World average	
House or chamber	Average percentage of women
Lower house	18.5%
Upper house	17.6%
Both houses combined	18.4%

Source www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.sep2008.htm (accessed on 20th Dec 2008).

Significant differences exist between regions regarding women's representation. The Nordic countries have the highest number of women parliamentarians while the Arab states have the lowest and within regions this representation varies among nations.

Regional average	Lower house	Upper house	Both houses combined
Nordic Countries	41.4%	-	41.4%
Americas	21.7%	20.1%	21.4%
Europe (Excluding Nordic Countries)	21.1%	19.9%	20.9%
Sub-Saharan Africa ^{1*}	17.9%	20.6%	18.2%
Asia	18.3%	16.5%	18.1%
Pacific	12.9%	13.8%	14.9%
Arab States	9.7%	7.0%	9.1%

Source <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.sep2008.htm>. (Accessed on 20th Dec 2008)

Feminist organizations throughout the world view the *Scandinavian countries*, Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden, as a model for women's equality. One key factor has been the very high representation that women have enjoyed in parliaments and local councils in these countries especially since the 1970's (Dahlerup, 2006).

Nordic countries	Women's representation	Election years
Sweden	47.0%	2006
Denmark	38.0%	2007
Finland	41.5%	2007
Norway	36.1%	2005
Iceland	33.3%	2007

Source <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classify2008-htm>. (Accessed on 20th Dec 2008)

The extraordinary high representation of women, as demonstrated in the above table, seen in a global perspective has led to the question: How did you come that far? What can we learn from the Scandinavian experience? As Nordic researchers have tried to answer these questions by pointing to structural changes in these countries such as secularization, the strength of social-democratic parties and the development of an extended welfare state, women's entrance into the labor market in large numbers in the 1960's, the educational boom in the 1960's, the electoral system and several other factors are also seen as important, especially the various strategies used by women's organizations in the Nordic countries in order to raise women's political representation (Dahlerup, 2006).

Women in the Nordic region had to fight for their rights and for their place not only in parliament but within political parties as well. For a long time women's relative absence from party politics was explained, both within research and among politicians, with reference to a shortage of suitable women. While feminist research has questioned that perspective and stressed the problem lies with the political system not with the women (Jonasdottir, 1998). In analyzing how the increase in women's representation came about and the reasons for the adaptation of quotas it is clear that an egalitarian culture played a very important role. An important part of the explanation for the relative success of women in the political sphere is connected to existing political institutions. Women, by and large, made an explicit decision to stay and work within existing political parties. They did not leave and establish separate political organizations. The candidate selection procedure placed an emphasis on group representation as women make 50 percent as a group. In short, the institutional arrangements played a crucial role in assisting women in their fight for greater representation. Greater women's political participation in this region is an inspiration to many women around the world who are fighting for greater access to political power (Matland, 2004).

In *Europe* representation of women in legislation is 19.3%. If we look at Europe, quotas are rather unpopular, except in the Balkans. In Western Europe, quotas mainly take the form of voluntary party quotas, Belgium and France being the exceptions. In Central and Eastern Europe very few political parties have approved quota regulations and no legal gender quota regulations for parliament are in place. Analysis of quota reveals that resistance to quotas in Western Europe is connected primarily to the belief that quotas are in conflict with the concept of liberal democracy and the principle of merit (Dahlerup, 2006).

In *Sub-Saharan Africa*, the increase in women's participation in the past few years has been greater than ever in the past four decades showing ten-fold to over 14 percent in 2003. Gender quotas are now increasingly viewed as an important policy measure for boosting women's access to decision-making bodies throughout the world. The experience from Africa is very encouraging. Over 20 countries on the continent have either legislated quotas or political parties have adopted them voluntarily. These measures have contributed directly to the increase in

the number of women who have access to the legislature: the average representation of women in Sub-Saharan Africa in 1995 was 9.8% (Ballington, 2004), which has increased to 18.2% in 2008.

Asia, with 18.3 percent representation of women in legislatures, is nearly equal to the world average. Asia is an interesting region in terms its experimentation with quotas, providing some of the earliest examples in the world. Pakistan implemented ‘reservations’ as far back as 1956, and Bangladesh implemented reserved seats for women in the 1970’s. Today, constitutional quotas exist in India and previously in Bangladesh, and legislated quotas are implemented in Pakistan, Indonesia and China. This region has shown a tendency for legislated quota provisions rather than leaving it for political parties to implement their own informal party quotas, as is common in Western Europe and parts of Africa. There is also a tendency for quotas to take the form of reserved seats, a popular method of quota implementation in first-past-the-post systems, which tend to predominate in the region (IDEA, 2004).

In *South Asia*, the maximum number of female leaders has emerged. Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan, Indira Gandhi of India, Khalida Zia and Hasina Wajid of Bangladesh and Sirivamo Bandranaika and Chandrika Kumaratunga of Sri Lanka are some of the more prominent among them. The general level of political participation among South Asian women does not reflect a similar trend. Political participation is often limited by constraints laid on their mobility and roles based on the socio-cultural perceptions. South Asia has been slow in political empowerment and representation of its women (Rustagi, 2004). The following table shows the average representation of women in South Asian countries.

Representation of women in South Asian countries			
Country	Total seats	Seats held by women	Average %
Pakistan	338	76	22.5%
India	541	49	9.1%
Sri Lanka	225	13	5.8%
Nepal	594	197	33.2%
Bangladesh	345	52	15.1%
Bhutan	47	4	8.5%
Maldives	50	6	12.0%
Total	2140	397	18.5%

Source <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classify2008> (Accessed on 20th Dec 2008)

In *India*, there is a continued dominance of the upper class in education, administration and structures of government. The eighty-fourth constitution Amendment Bill meant to provide one-third reservation of seats to women in states and central legislative bodies and the controversies around it mirror the contradictions of Indian society (Raman, 2002).

The protagonists of the Bill highlight the traditionally sanctioned exclusion of women from the public sphere as crucial. Undoubtedly, women’s suppression, in history, has been very important in maintaining upper-class exclusivity and hegemony. Affirmative action for women would certainly play a role in undermining male and upper-caste dominance. There is also a strong resistance on the part of a considerable number of political leaders to ‘encroachments’

into what has been a traditionally male preserve. The media has characterized the debate as a battle between 'feminists' and 'casteists' (Raman, 2002).

In India, the 73rd and 74th amendments passed in 1992 have been instrumental in ensuring a strong representation of women in local government institutions for women in local government and the provision for one third chair persons to be from among the women but there is no reservation of seats for women either in the State Legislative Assembly nor in parliament at the national level. The demand for reservation in the parliament by women's groups has raised many eyebrows and severe criticism. Many times the bill was taken in parliament but failed.

Women activists wanted to get this bill passed before the elections to the state assemblies and parliament to be held by the end of 2008. At least once a year a few members of parliament debate the need to reserve 33 percent of seats for women. The bill comes up when the parliament convenes but soon gets shelved with all the ensuing acrimony (Times of India: 2008).

In the case of *Sri Lanka*, women who have a presence in parliament are there by virtue of a kinship tie to a father, brother, or husband, who, in most cases was assassinated. One of the most critical barriers for Sri Lankan women is the fear of violence that has become associated with the political process. Another problem that is directly related to roles and a division of labor based on gender is the shortage of time women face when they shoulder responsibility for maintaining a household and generating income. Another is a shortage of resources. They do not have access to property or to other income resources. They often lack mobility, and there is frequently a problem with social acceptance. It is a bit ironic that men say politics is inappropriate for women because it is often violent, thus providing justification for excluding women (Mckenna, 1999).

In the October 2000 election, there were 22 political parties and 91 independent groups, which were able to field only 117 women in a total of 5,048 candidates. In the recently dissolved parliament of 2001, at the National level (2000) there were only 9 women in the parliament of 225 members (4%). In Sri Lanka reserved seats have never been accepted (Ghimir, 2006).

At the same time, women who entered the arena of politics remained divided according to their political loyalties, and they did not unite as one voice when concerns regarding women became a matter of importance. Women politicians at almost every level supported their political affiliations rather than planning and working for the common good of women (Abhayaratna: 2008).

In 1990 when *Nepal* restored parliamentary democracy, a constitutional mandate was passed to ensure the participation of women in the national election. As a result, 5 percent of all candidates who seek seats in the House of Representatives are reserved for women. Then, prior to local elections in 1997, the government passed an act that required 20 percent of the elected seats in the Village Development Committees (VCD) to be set aside for women elected to each of the nine wards that comprised a VCD. Partly as a result of this ruling, 35,000 women have won seats at the ward level. A number of women also have been assigned sets in an effort to further their political participation (Andrews, 1999).

However, women political leaders have resented the failure of the political parties to accord the mandated number of seats for women in contesting the constituent Assembly polls in 2008 according to the Law of the Land. Though the political parties have rightfully allocated 50 % of the seats for women according to the proportional mode of elections, they have failed to fulfill the requirement while fielding candidates for the first-past-the-post system that gives an opportunity for the electorate to vote for the candidates in direct term. The interim constitution of Nepal has already guaranteed 33% reservation to women in the national parliament (The Rising Nepal: 2008).

In the case of *Bangladesh*, the constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh provides for a 300-member parliament (Jatiyo Sangsad). Earlier, the parliament comprised a total of 315 seats out of which 15 were reserved for women for a period of 10 years. Members elected to parliament from the 300 'general' seats represent single-member territorial constituencies that both men and women are eligible to contest. The 15 reserved seats for women were indirectly elected. Members elected to general seats constituted the college for reserved seats (Chowdhury, 2002).

In 1978 a presidential proclamation increased the number of reserved seats to 30 (increasing women's minimum guaranteed representation in legislature from 4.7% to 9.9%) and extended the period of reservation to 15 years from the date of promulgation of the constitution of the Republic in December 1972. This constitutional provision lapsed in December 1987 and was reincorporated in the constitution by an amendment in 1990 to be effective for another 10 years. Since this provision lapsed in 2001, the present parliament does not have seats reserved for women, as was the case with the House elected in 1988 (Chowdhury, 2002).

Since no measures have been taken to encourage the role of women in political parties, this approach to reserved seats has left the entire electoral field open to male domination and control. Bangladesh's experiences with quotas for women in the parliament have been largely negative. Instead of contributing to women's political agency and autonomy, it accentuated their dependence in politics and reinforced their marginality (Chowdhury, 2002).

After the declaration of emergency on January 17, 2007, the emerging dialogue between the Election Commission and the major political parties has encouraged the shift in the focus of the military-driven interim government towards holding the general elections as expeditiously as possible. The Election commission has proposed to include at least 33 percent of women in all committees of the political parties which seems to be unacceptable for political parties (New Age: 2007).

Bhutan is one of the few countries where there are no political parties. However, at the district and village levels there are established mechanisms that foster people's active participation in the policy making process. Women in Bhutan enjoy economic and political equality with the men. Bhutanese women are free to participate in the formulation and implementation of policies and programs. At the national level, 14 out of the 150 National Assembly members are women (Ghimir, 2006).

Women are noticeable by their absence in the higher levels of the decision-making system, with just 3% representation in the recently dissolved National Assembly and 1% among the rural leadership. Women who are attending political meetings these days are mostly pledging their loyalties to the parties and not based on woman's issues. They have a strong say in all decisions concerning the family and the community but have not emerged as visible public figures (Kuensel: 2007).

The political system of *Maldives* is quite different to that of the rest of the South Asian countries. There is no special quota system in the parliament. In the absence of constitutional barriers to women's participation in top management, the main constraint to women's access to this position is the attitude of women themselves. The culture of female subordination has been so deeply rooted that women generally believe that they are less capable than their male counterparts. At present women's participation at the parliament is 6.3% (Ghimir, 2006).

The Pakistan Experience

Women undoubtedly played a significant role in the creation of Pakistan. The founder of the country, Quaid-i-Azam Mohammed Ali Jinnah, was responsible for bringing Muslim women

out of their homes to participate in the movement for Pakistan. He is on record for saying that the emancipation of Muslim men is not possible unless Muslim women are involved in this struggle as equal partners. When the movement for creation of Pakistan gathered momentum, Muslim women came out on the streets and were active in the demonstrations and agitations that took place for independence (Saiyid, 2001). Quaid-i-Azam appointed a Central Women's Committee with Fatima Jinnah as president with instructions to allocate women's quota in the Muslim League. The Quaid-i-Azam stated on 18th April 1946, at the Muslim Convention in Delhi: "It is a matter of great happiness that Muslim women are also undergoing a revolutionary change. This change is of great importance. No nation in the world can progress until its women walk side by side with the men".

What the Quaid had achieved was unprecedented, and amounted to a social revolution. The cultural norms of the Muslims of the Indian sub-continent discouraged women from going out of their homes, and at the time it was unthinkable for women to venture out of their homes for political purposes. The constant presence of Fatima Jinnah, the Quaid's sister, was not accidental, but a message by this visionary leader, that women should be equal partners in politics, and that they should not be confined to the traditional home-bound role of a wife and a mother. It is not surprising then that he was constantly under attack by the orthodox religious parties. Once, so the story goes, he was about to address a mammoth public meeting, and was requested not to have Fatima Jinnah sitting on the dais by his side. He refused (Saiyid, 2001).

Despite the vision of the father of the nation, the representation of women in the National Assembly of Pakistan has been varying since 1947. The constitution of 1956 and 1962 provided for 6 reserved seats for women in the National Assembly, while the 1973 constitution reserved 10 seats for women. Later these seats were increased to 20 in 1985 (ADB, 1999). In 2002 these seats have been revived and increased to sixty by the government of General Pervez Musharraf (PILDAT, 2004).

1 Constitutional Quota (1947-2008)

In view of women's invisibility in national politics, the provision of women's reserved seats in parliament existed throughout the constitutional history of Pakistan from 1956 to 1973. In the 1956 constitution, 3 percent quota for women was approved. The 1956 constitution under Article 44(2) (1) provided for reservation of 10 seats for women for a period of 10 years, equally divided between East and West Pakistan (PILDAT, 2004). The first election under the 1973 constitution was held in 1977 but assemblies were dissolved within months of the election with the imposition of Martial Law in July 1977. In 1981, General Zia ul Haq nominated the Majlis-e-Shoora (Federal Advisory Council) and inducted 20 women as members. The Majlis-e-Shoora was a step towards Zia's idea of Islamic democracy: however, it had no power over the executive branch. A military head whose function seemed to keep out all empowerment-seeking women effectively contained the Women Ministry (Sedeque, 2005).

In 1985, the National Assembly elections, through nonparty elections, doubled women's reserved quota to (20%). The 1988 elections were held with provisions for women's seats remaining the same as in 1985. This provision expired before the 1990 elections and has not been revived since then, despite commitments by both major political parties in their election manifestos that they would do so (Zia, 1999). Currently 60 seats are reserved for women in the Pakistan National Assembly. Presently a total of 71 women have obtained representation at the national level, 60 on reserved seats and 11 on general seats. Women occupy a total of 128 seats in provincial Assemblies. In local government presently 33% seats are reserved for women.

2 Women's representation in the National Assembly

In the October 2002 General Elections, 60 of the 342 seats in National Assembly were allocated to women- three times higher than the previous reservation of 20 seats for women. In the 2008 elections, there has been a discernible rise in the number of women running for elections to the National Assembly. If, in the 1988 elections, 27 women ran for the general seats, 20 years later the number was more than 60, four women were elected in 1988, while 13 took oath in the present assembly, one more than in 2002. In addition, hundreds of women registered themselves to contest for 60 reserved seats in the National Assembly and 128 in the provincial assemblies, where 116 ran for 577 general seats. For the first time, in the history of Pakistan the current assembly elected a female speaker Dr Fehmeeda Miza.

Provincial representation of women in the National Assembly				
Provinces	General seats	Women's seats	Non-Muslim	Total seats
Punjab	148	35	-	183
Sindh	61	14	-	75
NWFP	35	8	-	43
Balochistan	14	3	-	17
Fata	12	3	-	12
Non-Muslims	-	-	10	10
Total	272	60	10	342

Source <http://na.gov.pk/women.htm>. (Accessed on 20th Dec 2008)

3 Women in Provincial Assemblies

A quota for women is also applied in the Provincial Assemblies as is shown in the following table.

Women's representation In Provincial Assemblies			
Provinces	Total Seats	Women Seats	Percentage
Punjab	371	66	17.8%
Sindh	168	29	17.3%
NWFP	124	22	17.7%
Balochistan	65	11	16.9%
Total	728	128	17.6%

Source <http://www.pildat.org/publications/bgpaper-women.rep.pdf>. (Accessed on 20th Dec 2008)

4 Women in Legislatures

Between 1947 and 1997, 113 women were elected against seats in various National Legislatures including the nominated Majlis-e-Shoora (Mehrotra, 1998). The following table presents the history of women's representation in legislatures.

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	-	0.9%
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 Dec 2008)

5 Representation of women in Ministries

The following table exhibits the representation of women in federal and state ministries and parliamentary secretaries.

Role	Total Number	Women's representation
Federal Minister	37	3
State Minister	18	3
Parliamentary Secretary	19	3

Sources <http://www.na.gov.pk/ministeries.htm>. (Accessed on 20th Dec 2008)

6 Representation of women in local government

The military regime, which took power in October 1999, announced its plans for devolution of the government. Through legislation, it awarded 33% seats to women in the district, tehsil¹ and union councils through local elections in 2001. The local legislative body is mandated to approve by laws, taxes, long-term and short-term development plans and annual budgets.

¹ Tehsil is an administrative unit, consists of a city or town. As an entity of local government, it exercises certain fiscal and administrative power over the villages and municipalities within its jurisdiction. A District consists of tehsils.

The numbers of seats reserved for women in different councils are as follows.

Type of council	Seats reserved
Union Council (6,022)	36,132
Tehsil Council (305)	1,749
Town Council (30)	161
District Council (96)	1,988
Total	40,028

Source: http://www.nrb.gov.pk/lge_election/lge_02.asp (Accessed on 20th Dec 2008)

The women contested not only against the reserved seats but also on the open seats as well as in the union, tehsil and district councils and the posts of Nazims² and Naib Nazims³. However, in some areas of the NWFP women were prevented from either voting or running for office or both by religious groups and political parties resulting in a loss of approximately 650 seats. Overall, women got elected in 36,187 out of 40,049 reserved seats for women in the local councils, 11 were elected as union council Nazims, one as Naib Nazim and two as District Nazims (Aurat, 2001). In 2005, local elections 3,643 women were elected and 32 women were elected as District, Tehsil and Union Nazims.

Obstacles to women's participation

Barriers to women's political participation exist throughout the world. These obstacles reside in prevailing social and economic regimes as well as in existing political structures. Social and economic obstacles to women's participation include the unequal distribution of resources, lack of tradition and motivation to actively intervene in politics, the electorate's lack of confidence in women, economic and social criteria for political candidacy and exigencies of availability that political activity demands.

1 Political Parties

So far, the increased participation of women within the political parties has not led to a significant number of women appointees in important positions within the parties. In the absence of regular elections within most of the political parties, leaders usually nominate party activists to party positions within the party organizations.

Pakistan Peoples Party Parliamentarians (PPPP), which claims to be a liberal party, has only one female and 36 male member in its Central Executive Committee (PPPP, 2004). There are five women in the history of Pakistan, namely Fatima Jinnah (PML), Benazir Bhutto (PPPP), Nusrat Bhutto (PPP), Ginwa Bhutto (Shaheed Bhutto Group) and Nasim Wali Khan (ANP), who have been the leaders of their respective political parties. However, all of them inherited their political careers from their brother, husband or father and subsequently emerged as politicians in their own right.

2 A Nazim is the co-ordinator of cities and towns in Pakistan. Nazim is the title of chief elected official of a local government, such as a District, Tehsil, Union Council or Village Council. The Chief Nazim is a District Nazim who is elected by the Nazims of Union Councils, Union Councillors and Tehsil Nazims, who themselves are elected directly by the votes of the local public.

3 A Naib Nazim is a deputy Nazim. Apart from assistance, Naib Nazim performs the duties of Nazim in his absence.

In Pakistan, all political parties have specified their women's wings. However, the membership of women's wings is much smaller than the male membership of the party. These wings do not have any visible influence on the decision making processes and political programmes of their parties. In general, the parties mobilize women folk during elections to work as polling agents in women's booths, and demonstrate, on behalf of the party, when directed by the party's high command. Political parties tend to allocate the reserved seats to their family members. This reflects the inadequacy of the commitments of political parties and the ineffectiveness of any attempt to bring women into mainstream politics.

During the 2008 elections, there were far more women who applied for party tickets to contest the elections than political parties were willing to grant. Many who were refused tickets by their political parties decided to contest election as independents. However, all of them with the exception of Robina Watto from Okara lost. This shows opposing trends in politics where political parties continue to resist the granting of party tickets to female candidates whereas women's aspirations to become representatives within public domain are moving beyond constraints (Bari: 2008).

Religious parties and tribal and feudal structures dismiss the electoral rights of women. During the time of local bodies' elections, religious parties in NWFP convened a meeting where an election agreement was signed by the representatives of different parties to keep women away from contesting the polls. In Swabi, Mardan and Dir districts, women were not just prevented from filling their nomination paper but from even casting votes. In Malakand division, religious leaders gathered to declare that the Nikah, Namaaz-I-Janaza and all other religious rites of women candidates and voters would be boycotted (Mooraj, 2004). Some women councilors in Dir have been stopped from performing their duties. It is even more appalling that the male relatives of these women attend council sessions on their behalf (Dawn, 2006).

In the 2008 elections, the kind of change discussed above is refreshing. For the first time, women in South Waziristan voted. True, there were other areas, both in FATA and in the NWFP, where they were regrettably denied the ballot but against this backdrop, the decision of the Tribal elders in South Waziristan and other places to allow women to vote was a welcome one. This indicated that elders were willing to change by breaking with tradition and defying the militants. (The News: 2008)

2 Quota system

The quota system aims to increase women's representation to address the problem of under-representation of women. Quotas have been viewed as one of the most effective affirmative actions in increasing women's political participation. It has a positive impact on the number of women represented. The quota system has increased the seats of women in assemblies but it is a temporary measure to achieve gender balance. It does not facilitate the real political empowerment and the democratic participation of women. Women are treated as mere fillers for statistics without real political and economic power. This system provides only symbolic representation to women.

A certain quota of seats was especially reserved for women in Parliament since the 1946 elections. This tradition of reservation of seats for women continued to be required in the 1956, 1962 and 1973 Constitutions. Although the 1973 Constitution fixed reservation for women for two more general elections or ten years, whichever came later, the provision was to expire. This provision expired in the 1990 elections and has not been revised since. Despite commitments by both the major political parties, the women's reserved seats have not been restored (Saiyid, 2001). Now General Pervez Musharraf Government has the credit of increasing women's reserved seats to sixty.

Although women's representation in the assemblies has increased quotas, they do not work in isolation: they cannot be separated from dominant societal attitudes and norms. The socio-economic position of women in society means they are treated unequally by the men in the assemblies and their views are not taken seriously. Due to the lack of actual participation of women in politics, within political parties and towards a real knowledge of the political process, these women look towards their male political masters for direction.

3 Cultural values

Traditional roles and tasks assumed by women at home and activities outside home are presented as conflicting. The culturally accepted principle that women must first fulfill their responsibility at home and to their families hinders their entry and progress in politics (CID, 2002). Balancing family and career is a challenge to them. Generally society discourages women's activities outside the home, as it is harmful to their family life.

Women are perceived to have primary responsibility as wives and mothers. Hence, a political career may well come in these cases as a second or third job (Matland, 2004). The stigma of Politics as 'dirty' is somewhat connected to the previous notion.

Illiteracy is another problem. A gender gap exists in education. Primary school enrollment for girls stands at 60% as compared to 84% for boys. The secondary school enrollment ratio is even more discouraging: 32 and 46% for females and males, respectively. The adult female literacy rate is 29%. This gap is directly linked to the lower status of women in society and certain social norms that discourage empowerment of women as well as women's participation in the formal economic sector (Dawn, 2004).

The fact that women's economic participation is undermined is not accounted for in the national statistics. Culturally, women's wage work is considered a threat to the male ego and identity. Women enter the labor market on unequal terms vis-à-vis men and their occupational choices are limited due to social and cultural constraints. They are considered inferior because of women's primary role as homemakers.

The agricultural sector employs 79% of female labor force as compared with 57.3% of male workers. The majority of women in the urban sector work in low paying jobs. In the service sector, 63.2% of female workers are employed. Among the Federal Government Civil Servants 43.3% are working in basic pay scale grade 9 and below, while not a single woman is working in grade 22, which is the highest basic pay scale in Pakistan (South Asian Media, 2006).

4 Lack of unity among women parliamentarians

In Pakistan, women have a marginalized role in the parliament. During the sessions of the Senate in 2003-04, women senators raised only 201 (7%) out of a total of 2,769 questions. Similarly, out of 335 resolutions, only 43 (12%) were moved by women senators, and out of total of 400 motions, only 26 (7%) motions were passed by them (PILDAT, 2004).

Female parliamentarians are not keen to take up women's issues because of party politics. We must consider the role of women parliamentarians who came on the reserved seats for women. Gender quotas are argued on several grounds but the key argument for this affirmative action measure often includes: (a) the fact that women constitute half of the world population, therefore, it is simply an issue of justice to reflect their numerical strength in political institutions; (b) women have a specific perspective on politics and political issues, therefore, their presence will make a difference to politics and (c) they have special interests due to their reproductive roles and subordinate position in society, therefore, they must be present in political decision making bodies to represent and protect women's interests (Bari, 2006).

The Pakistan People's Party Parliamentarians (PPPP), when they were in power, twice, did

not move a bill repealing discriminatory laws against women on the pretext of lacking a two third's majority to annul or amend the law. PPP in opposition today needs to project itself as a liberal pro-women party (Bari 2004), so it supported the bill when moved by government.

Female members of parliament also failed to represent the interest of women and could not effectively articulate the consensus built on the repeal of the Hudood Ordinance by the women's rights activists and human rights organizations over the last twenty-seven years in the legislature. All of them were echoing their party positions. Women legislators of the Mutahida Majlas-e-Amal (MMA) were in the forefront in opposition to the bill. Their counterparts in the Pakistan Muslim League Quaid-i-Azam (PML-Q), Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and Mutahidda Qaumi Movement (MQM) also toed their party line to go along with the amendment. Women parliamentarian who came on the reserved seats did not understand that they were not accountable to their political parties alone but also to their constituency that was the woman of the country. It was critically important for them to have voiced women's interests to justify their existence and presence in the national assembly. It is understood that as members of political parties, the opinions of these women were subject to the discipline of their parties and they were expected to support their party position on the issue (Bari, 2006).

5 Non-indigenous empowerment

In the post 9/11 scenario the transnational stakes in Afghanistan have resulted in strengthening the progressive elements in Pakistan. The engenderment of Pakistan's political system has some links with international community stakes. Though there is evidence that a 33% quota was planned in the National Action Plan (1996-2002) it was crystallized after 9/11. Progressive elements imposed women's quota without doing proper homework – educating the predominantly conservative Pakistani society to absorb the change. Political representation has not been granted because of socio-political imperatives and it is not effective in promoting the cause of women. It is granted to them as a symbolic measure only. The reality is that the decision has been taken to portray the society of Pakistan as progressive.

95% of women elected as councilors in local government lack literacy and awareness whose main thrust to become a councilor is to get the amount allocated as monthly salary from Rs. 1000 to Rs. 5000. The general knowledge of councilors about their job is to serve the Nazim at the district level (Jabeen: 2004).

The national elite, which comprises of the civil and military bureaucracy, rules over the political institutions in Pakistan. More than half of the rule in Pakistan since its independence has been managed by the military: Ayub era 1958-1969, Zia Era 1978-1988, Musharraf era 1999 till today. The decision to establish 33% quota is imposed from the elite's in connection with pressures from International financial Institutions, the Most Developed Countries and Multinational Corporations of the world.

On October 18, 2007 Benazir Bhutto returned to Pakistan after eight years of self-imposed exile to contest elections after a 'deal' with President Musharraf. President Musharraf himself admitted in an interview that an American role cannot be denied in the initiation of dialogue with Benazir Bhutto. Benazir Bhotto was assassinated during the election campaign on Decembr 27, 2007 by religious militants. Men will argue that she was assassinated for her politics but the feminist perspective will necessarily see her death as a comment on the personal struggle of women in politics and in public service. (Shehrbano: 2007)

Potential solution

Here the paper provides three-dimensional strategy for generative engenderment of the political system of Pakistan.

1 Harness

The logic to harness women's potential aims at seeking the truth through a method that relies on an appreciation of the richness of human diversity and a desire for unity. Because it is based on universal spiritual principles, it is adaptable to any culture. It is regarded that human diversity is an asset. In decision-making, for instance, a diverse group, drawing on the wisdom, knowledge, and experience of each person, can solve complex problems more effectively than any single individual (BIC, 2000).

Women make decisions that are as good and as important as those made by men. In fact, women may even make better decisions than men for the simple reason that they take more factors into consideration in the contexts within which they make decisions (Nancy, 1992).

2 Harmonize

The second stage is to harmonize the change with the socio-political processes. Women have to justify the social as well as new political roles vis-à-vis traditional roles. Here we need to evaluate who is paying the cost for this change and who is benefiting. One may also feel that women are treated as subjects of change more than as agents of change. In fact it is observed that first they become subjects of change and then act as agents of change.

Political parties should also be amended so as to increase each party's membership of women to a minimum of 30% and representation in the central working committee to a minimum of 25% to ensure that women participate in the processes of decision making.

3 Homogenize

A feeling of cohesiveness should be created such that the status granted to women and reflected back on society is not only beneficial to women but also to men. This is time to tell the nation through media and research that women are paying more cost for their engagement in politics in the process of national development and progress.

Conclusion

The review of trends in the field of women's political empowerment shows a diverse progress report from different parts of the world. There are numerous difficulties still to be resolved. Targets set by UN for a 30% (which would eventually grow into 50%) participation has only been achieved in few countries. Some progress has been achieved over the past few years, towards enhancing women's political representation, as well as in the realization that women's involvement in politics is an important pre-requisite for democracy. Women are still facing key challenges.

The region of South Asia has had the largest number of female leaders but general trends do not show similarity in political participation of women. South Asia has been slow in the political empowerment of women.

In Pakistan, since independence, all regimes whether liberal, conservative or military have treated women's issues as political necessity only to project their regimes as liberal and modern to the world. These regimes gave limited rights to women for a place in society and politics. For instance, Ayub Khan introduced the Family Law Ordinance 1961, Zulfikar Bhutto's regime fixed 10% quota for women in parliament, Benazir Bhutto's government established Women's

Study Centre, First Women's Bank, and Women's Police Station. General Pervez Musharaf's era allocated the 33% women seats in local government and 17% seats in parliament. None of these regimes responded positively or responsibly to women's issues. Women's questions have been used to strengthen their own political agenda and to secure political points.

Men support the case of women only when they think that the interests of men would be served profoundly. Many women elected in parliament belong to politicians who have been already in power in Pakistan previously. This trend may manipulate the process of change in the interest of power regimes. The inaugural status of this quota may provide a base for future strengthening of women's status in Pakistan but we need to go from gender sensitivity to encompass the dimensions of collective gender rights. Changes are to be brought from within if they are to be sustained.

Women lack interest in politics because politics is projected as a 'negative' field. Women do not have participation in formal political processes. Men consider themselves 'traditional custodians' of political heritage and do not welcome women's participation in important political decisions. The immediate problems that women face include lack of political skill, financial resources and the dubbing of politics as an all male arena. The ideal of increasing the level of women's representation and participation in decision-making bodies requires well-developed strategies. It also seeks quality in women's representation, opportunities for women in formal education and training and scholarship grants to equip women to effectively participate in political activities.

One of the most important signs of the modernization of society is connected to the role of women in society. We cannot imagine a modern society without considering the status of women; we cannot imagine such a society if women do not enjoy their social, political, cultural and economic rights and if women have not achieved full dignity and social status. In relative terms, the status of women has improved in contemporary Pakistani society with the passage of time, but the ideal of women's empowerment is still a distant dream.

References

- Abhayaratna, Manel. (2008) "Empowerment of Women: Who Cares" *Daily Mirror*, March 11.
- ADB (1999) *Asian Development Bank* "Situational Analysis of women in Pakistan-An overview", Briefing Paper. p 14.
- Andrews, A. Julio. (1999) "Nepal" *Strengthening Democracy Through women's political Participation* (The Asian Foundation Publication), P, 3.
- Aurat Foundation, (2001) "Citizen's Campaign for Women's Representation in Local Government" Aurat Publications and Information Service Foundation, pp. 24-25.
- Belington, Julie. (2004) "The implementation of Quotas: African experiences" *Quota Report Series* (IDEA Publications) P, 3.
- Bari, Farzana. (2005) "Women's political participation: Issues and Challenges" (United Nations: DAW, Expert meeting group, Bangkok, Thailand, 8-11 Nov. P 1
- Bari, Farzana. (2006) "Negotiating Women's Right", *The News*, November 25.
- Bari, Farzana. (2004) "On the Altar of Political Expediency", *The News*, April 05.
- Bari, Farzana. (2008) "Women's Agenda", *The News*, March, 28.
- BIC, (2000), *Bahai International Community*, <http://bic.org>, Sep 09.
- Chowdhury, Dr Najma. (2002) "The Implementation of Quotas: Bangladesh Experience- Dependence and Marginality in Politics", *Quota Report Series* (IDEA Publications)
- CID (2005) the quota system: women's boon or bane? <http://www.cid.org/2005.htm>. (Accessed on 02 April 2005)
- Dahlerup, Drude. (2006) *Women Quotas and Politics*, (London: Routledge), p 21
- Dawn*, (2006) Editorial "Plight of Women Councilors", May 03.
- Ghimir, Dogra. (2006) "South Asian Situation on women in politics" paper presented at the 6th Asia Pacific Congress on Political Empowerment of Women Organized by the *Center for Asia – Pacific Women in Politics* in Manila 10-12 Feb.

- IDEA (2003) *International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance*, "The implementation of quotas: Asian Experience" quota workshops report series Jakarta Indonesia 25 Sep 2002 (IDEA Publications) P, 4.
- Jabeen, Mussarat. (2004) "Redefining the Politics of Presence", *Proceedings International Conference Social Sciences: Endangered and Engendered*, (Fatima Jinnah Women University) p 482.
- Jonasdottir, G. Anna. (1998) *Is there a Nordic Feminism, Nordic Feminist Thought on Culture and Society*, (London: Routledge), p 22
- Kuensel, (2007), Editorial, "Make Way for Women", December, 12.
- Matland, E. Richard. "The Norwegian Experience of Gender Quotas", A paper presented at the *International Institute for Democracy and electoral Assistance (IDEA)/ CEE Network for Gender issues conference*. Budapest, Hungary, 22-23 October 2004.
- Mckenna, Mark Reade. "Sri Lanka" *Strengthening Democracy Through women's political Participation*. (The Asian Foundation Publication), P, 8.
- Mehrotra, Aparna. (1998) "Gender and Political Participation", *UNDP Regional Bureau*.
- Mooraj, Anwar. (2004) "Women's right to contest polls", *The News*, April 05.
- Nancy, W. Veeder, (1992) "Women's Decision-Making: Common Themes---Irish Voices, Westport, (Praeger Publishers) p 1.
- New Age*, (2007), Editorial. "Women's Participation in Policy making non-negotiable", September 14.
- PILDAT (2004) *Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency* "Women Representation in Pakistan's Parliament", Lahore. P, 18.
- PPP (2008) *Pakistan Peoples Party* <http://www.ppp.org.pk/party/cec.htm>. (Accessed on 20th Dec 2008)
- Raman, Vasanthi. (2002) 'The Implementation of quotas for women: The Indian experience' *Quota Report Series* (IDEA Publication)
- Rustagi, Dr. Pareet, (2004) "Women and Development in South Asia", *South Asian Journal*, April-June. P, 54.
- Saiyid, Dushka. (2001) "Women in Politics-Problems of participation: A case study of Pakistan", *ISSI Journal*, XXI No. 2 Summer.
- SAM (2008) *South Asian Media* <http://www.southasianmedia.net/profile/Pakistan/Pakistan-women.cfm>. (Accessed on 5th September 2008)
- Shehrbano, Afiya. (2007), "Benazir and Feminism", *The News*, December, 31.
- The Rising Nepal*, (2008), Editorial, March, 01.
- Times of India*, (2008), Editorial. "Empowerment of Women", March 09.
- The News*, (2008), Editorial, "Women in Elections", Feb 21.

SAIRA BANO is a lecturer in Defence and Diplomatic Studies (DDS) at Fatima Jinnah Women University, The Mall, Rawalpindi, Pakistan.