

Female Political Participation in South Asia: a Case Study of Pakistan

Arfan Latif

University of the Punjab, Lahore.

Ahmed Usman

University of the Punjab, Lahore.

Jafar Riaz Kataria

University of the Punjab, Lahore.

Muhammad Abdullah

Lahore Leads University, Lahore.

Abstract

The objective of the current study is to find out the male's perception about female political participation. Prior researchers in this area were mostly quantitative hence the current study is a qualitative study to get an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. This study used purposive sampling technique and the findings of the study are based on 20 in-depth interviews and 2 focus group discussions. The study concluded that religious, economic and patriarchal mind-set is the main factors that hinder women in the field of politics. The findings of the current study can be effectively used to make women participate in a more productive way by increasing the awareness at the grass root level and by making appropriate policies and the national level.

Keywords: Women, Politics, local power structures, state institutions.

Introduction

Women constitute about half of the world's population. Their contribution in the social and economic sphere is also very significant by virtue of dual roles in the productive and reproductive spheres. But their participation in the politics remains unattended which is the most important institution of society that is related to the power and decision making processes. The women representation worldwide is only 15% and there are only 12 countries of the world that has 33% seats for women in parliaments (UNDP report, 2005). 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 a patriarchal society like Pakistan the participation of women in political arena is very much in connection with males and how they perceive their participation. The constitution of Pakistan grants full participation of the women in Politics; nevertheless their

South Asian Studies 30 (2)

participation in politics at all level remains meager due to cultural and structural barriers. At different times of the history the women political participation has been very low in Pakistan but the recent and 2002 parliament has shown the most representation of women in politics.

This paper tries to investigate the conceptual and material based exclusion of the women from politics and the historical context of women political participation in Pakistan. Further this paper will elaborate the factors that hinder or facilitate the women political participation with regard to the Male's perception. In the end the paper will draw policy based recommendations for the uplift and improvement of the women political participation at Global level and in Pakistan also.

The current study attempts to unearth how the male's perception is affecting the women political participation in Pakistan.

Research Question

“How the male's perception influence the women political participation in Pakistan”

Objectives of the Study

- i) To gauge the perceptions of males about women's participation in politics at different levels and unearth factors that affect these perceptions
- ii) To explore the role of local power structures, state institutions, existing policies and practices of the state and non-state institutions in forming males' perceptions towards woman's participation in politics in general and also about the women who occupy decision making positions in political parties/organizations

Literature Review

Bari, (2005) in a study formulated and narrated some important factors which hinder the women political participation. Ideological factors, political factors, socio-cultural factors, economic factors are very important in this regards. Besides these lack of capital and strategy for women political participation are also in the same regard.

According to a briefing paper in 2011 the women political participation is very much exclusive in Pakistan. Pakistan has a strong international and domestic legal framework for the protection of women's right to vote, but their exclusion from voting process remains a stark problem. While legislative and regulatory changes can help to increase women's representation among the electorate, it is the poor implementation of the law that creates the gap between principles and practice. Therefore the key issue is one of sufficient political will on the part of stakeholders who can influence the process, including the ECP, political parties and domestic observer groups.

Female Political Participation

Bano, (2009) conducted a study to observe the situation of women in Parliament in 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. The study concluded that 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.

Shami, (2009) conducted a study to find out the historical concept of women political participation in Pakistan. Women participated actively in the Pakistan movement. Ms. Fatima Jinnah was the first mostly known figure who participated in the struggle movement. During the era of Bhutto women participation was also quite significant but in the period of Zia's Martial Law the women political participation was lean. However, Musharraf's age was very important and significant in this regard. He increased the seats allocation for the women in politics both at the district and national level. In the history of Pakistan the women political participation has gone through many ups and downs.

Kiev, (2011) stated that despite the evident progress made by Ukraine in ensuring gender parity, the current situation shows unacceptably low levels of participation of Ukrainian women in political and decision making processes at national level. According to all international commitments and indicators, Ukraine is moving in the wrong direction in terms of promoting women's participation in politics and decision-making.

Tahri, (2003) conducted a study to show the women political participation in Morocco. The electoral process started in 2002 but women are playing a vital role in political process of the country. Women account for 50% of the women and they are also their rate of electoral participation is the same as that of men, if not higher, they have continued to be excluded, for decades, from the corridors of power. This is despite the fact that the number of female candidates has increased with each succeeding year. Though, the women constituted the half of the total population of the country with almost same percentage of electoral participation still remained excluded for decades from the corridors of power. However the number of female candidates has increased with each succeeding year.

Wide (2006), conducted a comparative and longitudinal study to demonstrate the women political participation and different aspects that influence the women political participation. Wide argues that women's political representation is a result of the interplay between structures, actors and institutions. In her dissertation, Wide presents the empirical findings on spatial variation of female representation on the national level. She concludes that institutions are the most important factors. The overall setup and the structure of the society is the main determinant of the women political participation.

Philips, (2000) explores in her study that over representation of a particular social group leads to over-representation of opinion and vice versa. The lower

South Asian Studies 30 (2)

representation of women in political participation leads to lower representation of opinion of women. What Phillips points to is that under-representation of women in politics is to be viewed as structural or intentional discrimination. This implies that there are factors behind the under representation of the women that lies within the structure of the society. This analysis provides more of a macro level analysis of women political participation.

Sumbadze (2008) conducted a study to find out the difference between the representation of women and actual outcome of that particular representation. This study suggested that gender in politics has two sides, and although separate it is associated with each other. One is women's representation and the other is concern for women's issues. Representation increases the likelihood for considering women's issues as well as brings in gender perspective; however representation on its own cannot guarantee the desired outcome. This study concludes that steps are being taken to increase the representation of the women both at national and international level still their issues are not being addressed adequately.

National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW, 2010) in its report suggested that women are not much active despite coming into the field of politics. Although women are brought into political institutions, no effort is made to transform the patriarchal nature and culture of institutions. Therefore, even though it helped a small percentage of women enter the government; their participation was constrained because the structures perpetuating inequality were left intact. This report concludes that women are entering into politics but their performance is not according to that and main reason behind is gender stereo typing.

McCarthy and Sultana, (2004) conducted a study to explore the possible hindrance in the women political participation in Pakistan. Domestic violence and other forms of violence are flourishing in families, society and also in the state as a means of controlling women. The legal rights of women are curtailed by the introduction of the shariat law and the Muslim family law, which bestow unequal rights upon men and women in matters regarding inheritance, marriage, guardianship of children, etc. Their subordinate social and legal status and domination by men in the family, society and state obstruct their participation in public life. Hence the patriarchal mind-set is considered to be a key issue in limiting the women political participation in Pakistan.

Nadezhda Shvedova (2007) investigated the limitations on women political participation and divided these limitations into three broader categories. The first is political such as the masculine model of politics, lack of party support, cooperation with women's organizations and electoral system; the second is ideological and psychological for example traditional roles, lack of confidence, the perception of politics as "dirty" and the role of mass-media; and the last one socioeconomic obstacles which include feminization of poverty and unemployment, the dual burden and lastly, education and training.

Research Design

Female Political Participation

The present study used qualitative method to investigate the male's perception about female political participation. The existing literature shows that most of the researches conducted on this field used quantitative techniques and merely used statistics to show the women political participation. However this topic requires a more detailed and in-depth understanding to know the issues and challenges faced by the women in political arena. So the researchers used qualitative method to investigate the phenomena of women political participation.

Geographical setting of the study

The current study has been conducted in Lahore the capital of Punjab Province. The constituency for the current study was PP (165). Decision to select the above district and constituency was made mainly on the convenience. The current district and constituency was nearby Lahore and hence it was a mixture of modern, literate people and people with traditional backgrounds. It was chosen on the basis of its remoteness, poor socioeconomic indicators, feudalism and feudalistic thinking.

Selection of the Respondents

As the topic being investigated is very sensitive and complex hence the selection of the respondents was a difficult phase in the research. Keeping in view the objectives of the study purposive sampling technique was used. Purposive sampling occurs when a researcher wants to identify particular types of cases for in-depth investigation." (Neuman; 2006).

The researchers selected three main and known political parties of the constituency for the selection of the respondents. PML-N, PPP and PTI were selected. Key position holders of these political parties including provincial, district & Tehsil presidents were selected. For a more comprehensive approach to the study staff/ officials from NGOs working on political awareness were selected. They all were from different backgrounds and socio economic statuses. Age group of the respondents ranged from 30 to 55 while socioeconomic backgrounds varied from a common business person earning around 25000 to a person who would earn over 100,000 a month. Almost all were over intermediate (FA); twelve years of education.

Participants were selected on the basis of their role/function that they perform. Efforts were made to ensure that people from all relevant walks were represented in IDIs including representatives from NGOs, leading political parties, elected representatives, party workers, men and women holding key positions in political parties. As these people were selected on the basis of their role and function, therefore it was difficult to manage group homogeneity. As a result, IDI participants represented mixed groups in relation to socioeconomic class, family background, qualification and age groups. People were also selected from elite

South Asian Studies 30 (2)

groups (political parties), upper middle and middle social groups, and those who owned big businesses.

Tool for data collection

Being the qualitative research and the topic investigation in-depth understanding of topic was required. Interview guide is best suited method when the researcher wants to unpack the in-depth understanding of the topic being investigated (Devi, 1997). So keeping in view the complexity and sensitivity of the topic in-depth interviews were conducted. 20 in-depth interviews were conducted from different respondents and people from different walks of the life. 5 in-depth interviews were conducted from the political representatives. 5 in-depth interviews were conducted from the staff/officials of the NGOs working on political awareness. The remaining 10 in-depth interviews were conducted from a mixture of civil society activists and known businessmen of the area/constituency.

Focus Group Discussion

To make a more comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the topic it was decided by the researcher to conduct 2 focus group discussions. Focus Group Discussion are conducted to get a contradictory information about a topic so that all the relevant information can be obtained (Barbour, R. (2007)) General voters of Pakistan election commission (holding local level positions and working for party) and the other of the voters (general masses particularly those having a vote registered with Pakistan election commissions). However, a group representing youth from voters and party workers was included in the FGDs. So, diverse but homogeneous groups for the FGDs were formed and consulted using FGD qualitative guidelines. Socioeconomic background of the people who took part in FGDs reflected middle income groups in the range of Rs.10000 to 30000 a month. They were all from middle/ lower middle social group and the age bracket was 25-40. The groups of FGDs, especially the voters were involved in small business, petty trading, some working in Government and Private sectors as middle managers or supervisory staff.

Data Analysis

In qualitative researches qualitative data analysis is a very important phase that requires the organization and managing the collected data carefully (Bouma, 2000). The data was analyzed on the basis of themes. At the first stage interviews were transcribed and were reviewed many times to come up finally with some themes. The data were categorized based on commonalities and differences across

Female Political Participation

emerging themes (Ghauri and Gronhaug, 2002). The current study used the domain analysis technique to analyze the qualitative data. This is the best suited method when the researchers want to get in-depth understanding of a particular cultural issue. According to James Spradley (1997) the domain is the basic unit in a cultural setting and the domain has three parts i.e. (1) a cover term which is the name of the domain, (2) includes term or the subtypes (3) a semantic relationship. The domain analysis is best suited in those researches when you have to define a particular social issue in a particular cultural setting (Sarah and Abu El Hap, 1996). So the current study used the domain analysis technique to analyze the data. The cover term, included term and semantic relationship used in this research are summarized as under.

(Cover Term)	Included Terms	Semantic Relationship
Male's perception about female political participation	Structural constraints in the female political participation (economic, social, religious) and Individual level constraints (perception) Female political participation	Rationale. Change in one included term changes the values and direction of the other/ second included term

Findings

The findings of the study are based on the data analysis. The topics where the researcher wanted to pursue the opinion of the respondent were their general views about female political participation, the hindrance in the female political participation, their actual role in politics and religious orientations about women political participation. All these aspects collectively measured the male's perception about female political participation. Following are the themes that emerged in the current study with regard to female political participation and how male perceive their participation.

Insecurity, lawlessness doesn't permit women to venture out and be political

Concerns about lawlessness and the resulting insecurity are a big hurdle which withholds men allowing their family women to participate in politics. The security situation of the country is not well owing to rape cases, bombing and terrorism. This situation hinders the way of women specifically to participate in politics as they face security issues such as extremism, often in the name of religion; limited mobility; lack of resources and education and political experience. Overall political parties' environment too is not women friendly, they have to struggle hard and face multi-dimensional issues to create space for them in the party

When a woman enters politics, she faces problems from the start. People create hurdles in her way, discourage her and even do character assassination of

South Asian Studies 30 (2)

her. Politics is the arena of those who are either very rich or those who have no self-respect; it makes no difference to them what people are saying about them. In our society there is sexual deprivation and fear of exploitation because of which males over-protect their women-folk. There are so many social bindings regarding female protection.

Women are not strong and cannot deal with prevailing vandalism in politics and law enforcing agencies

It was the general perception of voters and party workers that politics is a field for men where a show of power is essential; mostly demonstrated and established by open display of arms. Women obviously cannot match this show of strength. They also observed that an MNA or MPA has to get work done for the people through law enforcing agencies and land/revenue department. Women cannot go to police stations and *katchehri* and deal with SHO and *patwari* to get things sorted out for the people of the constituency and thus fail to muster support from the communities. A political party worker concluded that women cannot physically handle men in such an environment. A woman cannot be expected to physically tackle a man (in a difficult situation) because she is weak.

Religious orientation

Religious orientation or affiliation came up as a very strong determinant in restricting the women from politics. Most of the respondents think that women should not allow participating in politics because they cannot mingle with opposite sex openly, because religion does not allow or permit them to do so. One of the respondents even quoted on very important and authentic Hadees.

Holy Prophet PBUH said:

“That Nation can never make its mark which lets itself be reined by the women (Bokhari, 4425).

This signifies that the lack of participation of women in politics in Pakistan is mainly due to the religious factors. People who are more religious tend to restrict and oppose women participating in politics. This is the main factor that has shaped the perception of the male in our society.

Women are not financially independent

Finance is a crucial issue that females encounter in politics as they are dependent to men. Since a vast majority of the women is financially dependent to their males, they cannot contest elections without the consent of their families. Majority of the voters in Lahore said that women need financial support of family i.e. father, husband or brothers to contest elections. Women can contribute in politics to a great extent but the basic hurdle in their way is dependency on males. When they are financially independent, they can assert themselves as decision makers.

Male chauvinism and their ego doesn't permit women to enter politics

Some participants in the voters' group in Lahore admitted that it is hard for them to accept women in a superior or managerial role. One of the participants commented that women need to struggle far more than males but are appreciated less. Good performance and responsiveness can do well for women to grow in politics. Males' narrow perception about females' qualities and capabilities is a major hurdle for females' progress and emancipation. A male, even if he is qualified and manifests broadmindedness, does not allow a female the same space. Some women are also engaged in leg pulling but men try to create such an environment that hampers a woman's progress. The macho male inside his self emerges when he realizes that a woman, who entered politics after him, is "threatening" to take the lead.

Women being mothers can contribute effectively in the fields of education, health and social welfare

The current study found that it is the general impression among the males of the society that women are more appropriate to contribute in the fields of health and education rather than politics. The female's body structure and emotional placement make them unfit in the field of politics. Being emotionally sensitive women can be tender and more contributing in the domain of welfare and education in the form of teachers and mentors. Participants perceive that women can talk freely to females on sensitive issues like health and contraception since they have access to go inside the house and talk to women for counseling and guidance.

Discussion

Women are vulnerable, in need of male guardianship and unsuited for political life. Perceptions such as these continue to pose a major barrier for the recognition of women's participation in politics. Women political participation is very important indicator of development of any country. The women political participation has always been an important aspect of Pakistani politics right from the days of independence movement. But with the passage of time the participation of women shrink only to the specific class of people. The objective of current study was to investigate the male's perception regarding the female political participation specifically in a Pakistani context. Bari (2005) concluded from his study that ideological and socio-cultural factors mostly hinder the women political participation. The current study also gathered that religious and Pakistani culture does not promote the women political participation. The situation of

women political participation all over the world is not significant and women face many problems in the political sphere (Kiev 2011, Tahri 2003, UNDP report 2005). The similar situation is found in the Pakistani context where the women political participation is very low both at the local and national level. The low representation of the women in political field is embedded in the overall social structure of the society (Philips, 1995). In this particular study it was found the societies collectively hinder the way of women in politics. The overall religious, political, economic and social setup of Pakistan is the main root cause behind the less representation of women. The current study concluded that political, social and religious factors are the main reasons to restrict women in the politics. Such findings are similar to the study conducted by Nadezhda Shvedova (2007) that also revealed same findings with regard to the women political participation. McCarthy and Sultana, (2004) in a study found that it was the male's perception and patriarchal mind-set that restricted the women in Pakistan. The current study also concluded that male chauvinism and their ego don't permit women to enter politics. Males consider women subordinate to them hence they don't want to share political power and decision making with women.

Limitations

The selection of the respondents was very important segment in the research. However, it was not possible to maintain homogeneous characteristics for the groups designed for political party workers because they could only be selected on the basis of their role, function and designation within a political party.

Like all the qualitative researchers the sample of the current study was not completely representative. The findings of the study are based on the 20 in-depth interviews. The results of the current study cannot be generalized to the larger population being the qualitative study and due to the non-probabilistic sampling methodology. The study was conducted in a single constituency hence the findings of the study cannot be generalized to larger population.

Mostly the answers of the respondents were not explanatory rather they mostly defended the male's behavior and attitude towards the female's political participation. Hence their responses cannot be treated as explaining the issues and hurdles faced by the female in politics.

Implications

The findings of the current study can be very useful to enhance women political participation in Pakistan. This study could be implied at policy level to increase the women political participation. Such policies could be initiated by the government that may help the women to participate actively in the political domain of the country.

Furthermore the findings of the current study show that religion is the most important and significant factor in restricting the women from politics. So, the

Female Political Participation

religious scholars can be motivated to interpret the religious guidance in this regard.

Awareness at the grass root level which is mainly formed by the local bodies and community level may also be raised to promote the women participation in the politics. The findings of the current study can be utilized in a very well manner to promote the acceptance among male of the society to the women political participation.

Recommendations

To address the negative perceptions, one must start at the family and societal level where such perceptions are sustained through repeated social conditioning. No human being is born with the conception of one sex being dominant over the other or a conception of equality (or lack thereof). It is through observation and conditioning that men form perceptions regarding women's roles and "limitations". So focusing on the education system seems like a logical start. The curriculum especially in early education should not reinforce gender stereotypes. Religion could also be invoked and women with profound religious knowledge should also come forward to interpret the relevant Quranic text. The religion, Islam in local contexts allows women a greater degree of freedom than it is stated generally. Reason illustrates that interpretation of religious texts has always been majorly conducted by men who are in power. Therefore, it carries a bias and reinforces the current patriarchal system which serves the interest of men and marginalizes women. This is a long-term goal as only when the younger generation of today grows up to believe that women are equal and important contributors to the society. Only then they would be able to respect not only the women in their family, but also other women they see or interact with.

Conclusion

Restricted mobility, weak decision making power, family responsibilities and cultural as well as religious "norms" and practices were among the main issues that surfaced during discussions. Consequently, less than half of the total respondents were of the view that women can take part in politics despite the aforementioned restrictions. The respondents holding this viewpoint mostly constituted youth, representatives of the political parties holding upper and lower level positions, media and civil society representatives.

Generally, people in the low socio-economic slab were found to be more resistant and rigid to women's political activism and participation. Whereas, people representing middle and upper middle class mostly supported women's right to take active part in politics. Within the social classes, youth was found to be proactively in favor of women participation as compared to other age groups, a significant finding.

Education was found to be one of the key factors that helped shape public opinion. However, social traditions still seem to have a major influence as is evident from the responses of the respondents. Majority of the young respondents in the former Lahore actually opposed women participation in politics while the latter were vocal in their support. Evidently, the feudal-pir (“holy persons”) axis and a conservative social environment, supported by a one-dimensional religious interpretation ensure that women participation in politics is seen as a deviation from social and religious norms. The social mindset is strongly influenced and restricted because of the convergence of feudal –cum-patriarchal interests.

Majority of participants of FGDs were of the view that prevailing environment in Pakistan was not conducive for women to participate in politics. Cultural traditions segregate the population by gender. The general perception was that women are not safe outside the house. This was more pronounced where traditionally women are not supposed to venture out due to purdah. Therefore, the respondents appeared to be far more protective of their women as compared to their counterparts in Lahore. Participants of the voters’ FGD said that in their respective areas, feudal lords made sure that no one apart from the family may even cast a look at their female family members. For instance, some feudal families reportedly ensure that the general public clearly understands that it cannot “violate” the unwritten code of not looking at feudal family women. When their women travel, it is preceded by an announcement.

References

- Bangkok, Thailand, 8-11 November 2005-10-29 EGM/WPD-EE/2005/EP.12
- Bari F. Women’s Political Participation: Issues and Challenges(Draft) 3 November 2005
- Bano S.Women in Parliament in Pakistan: Problems and Potential Solutions, Women’s Studies Journal, Volume 23 Number 1, September 2009: 19-35. ISSN 1173-6615
- Bouma G. D (2000) the Research Process (4th Edition) Oxford University Press Australia
- Barbour, R. (2007) *Doing Focus Groups.(The SAGE Qualitative Research Kit, 8 v ols)*. Thou and Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Bukhari Shareef, Hadees No. 4425
- Devi L (1997) Encyclopedia of Social Research, Lucknow: Anmol publications Pvt. Ltd
- Enhancing Participation of Women in Development through an Enabling Environment for Achieving Gender Equality and the Advancement of Women: Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW); Expert Group Meeting, United Nations
- Institute for Policy Studies (IPS), Tbilisi.
http://www.unifem.org/gender_issues/democratic_governance/2009-11-30

Female Political Participation

- James P. Spradley, Wadsworth Thomson Learning (1979) "Participant Observation and the Ethnographic Interview"
- McCarthy F. and Sultana M., 2004. Gender and governance issues in local government: regional report of technical assistance in Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan. Manila: Asian Development Bank
- National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW), 2010a. Study on local bodies system and its impact on women. Pakistan: NCSW.
- Neuman W. L (2006), 'Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches' (6th edition),
- Phillips A. (2000) Närvaronspolitik – den politiska representational avkän, etnicitetochras. Studentlitteratur. Lund. Original "The Politics of Presence" (1995). Oxford University Press
- Sarah Atkinson¹ And Mónica Abu El Hap Health Policy And Planning; 11(4): 438-442 Oxford University Press 1996
- Shami A. A. Political Empowerment of Women in Pakistan, Pakistan Vision Vol. 10 No 1,2009.
- Sumbadze N. (2008) Sida, UNDP, Gender and society: Georgia (2008). Prepared by the
- Shvedova, Nadezhda (2007) "Obstacles to women's participation in Parliament" In Women in parliament: Beyond numbers, Handbook by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, IDEA
- Tahri R. Women's Political Participation: The Case of Morocco; Association Démocratique des femmes du Maroc
- Ukrainian Women's Fund, Strategy Pape: EC-OSCE/ODIHR Project to Promote Democratization and Human Rights in Eastern Europe, Kiev, 2011
- Wide J. (2006) Kvinnors politiska representation iettjämförandeperspektivnationellochlokalnivå. Avhandling, Print & Media, UmeåUniversitet
- Women's Participation in Politics and Decision-Making in Ukraine:

Biographical Note

Arfan Latif is Lecturer at Government College, Sharaqpur, Pakistan.

Dr. Ahmed Usman is Assistant Professor at Institute of Social & Cultural Studies, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan.

Jafar Riaz Kataria is Senior Research Fellow / Lecturer, at Centre for South Asian Studies, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan.

Muhammad Abdullah is working as an In-charge, Department of Sociology, Lahore Leads University, Lahore, Pakistan.
