



WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN PAKISTAN DURING THE MUSHARRAF REGIME: REVERIE OR REALITY?

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Abstract:

At beginning of the 21st century the wave of women empowerment in Pakistan, especially in politics, has remained a popular phenomenon for academic debates. There is no doubt that in 2002, before the general elections, women have been given the chance to induct themselves into political errands of the country under the famous slogan of 'enlightened moderation' by Gen. Pervez Musharraf, and the history witnessed a maximum number of female politicians in the legislative assemblies. This research is aimed at analyzing critically the phenomenon of women empowerment under the Musharraf regime with identifying correlation between an increased number of female politicians on fixed seats and the strength of women as a gender. For this purpose, the variables of violence against women and women's employability have been evaluated as dependent on the increased political representation of women in Pakistan. To understand the connection between both variables, a quantitative method has been used to get the statistical data of women politicians in the assemblies, cases of violence against women and ratio of women employability during Musharraf regime and through qualitative analysis; it is found that increased political representation failed to escalate strength of women as a gender.

Keywords: Legislative Assembly, Musharraf, Representation, Violence, Women empowerment
Introduction

“No nation can rise to the heights of glory unless your women are side by side with you.”
(Muhammad Ali Jinnah)



Women as a gender had gone through a long way of struggle and are still fighting for their empowerment because traditionally they have been undermined and marginalized in patriarchal societies like Pakistan, as gender equality is the key to human liberation. Class power and patriarchy are two examples of the global effects of dominance that are made possible by power interactions at the micro level of society, as shown by the hierarchical analysis of power. Power relations are the by-product of the conflicts between individuals and groups who want to influence the actions and lives of one-another and the success of one weakens the power of others. Since men as a gender have aroused as a dominant class of the patriarchal societies like Pakistan, women have lost their due place in the society. (Bari, 2000) When such dynamics arise in a culture, it is the duty of both progressive men and women to take specific actions to alter the social norms that elevate women above other people. The best form of democracy requires gender equality where opportunities are distributed equally between the both genders. Gender equality is probably the most effective mean to evaluate the level of inclusivity in a political system. Unfortunately the political structure in Pakistan lacked this level till Musharraf regime (Butt & Shahid, 2012). Besides the fact that women comprise half of the country's population they have been continuously dragged down in the leadership cadre of political parties. Although Pakistan has remained well known for its highly eloquent and leading women like Benazir Bhutto, but is also known throughout the world for the brutal restriction placed on women, 'honor killing' being the most extreme example. Benazir Bhutto became the first female prime minister of Pakistan in 1988, Fehmida Mirza became the country's first female speaker in 2008, and in 2013 there were the most women in both chambers of parliament (Khan, 2007). But it's also the country where religious fanatics attempted to murder Malala Yousafzai just because she roused her voice for girls' education.

The country with such a diverse scenario of female representation provides the need to understand the reason and potential of women empowerment for its socio-political and economic development. This research is an effort to analyze the measures related to women empowerment in Pakistan especially in the beginning of 21st century, the time which is acknowledged for being the turning point for the media and women empowerment in the country. The focus of this research paper is on the women because being a so-called 'weaker sex', it's interesting to gauge their rising power status and the reasons or motives related to their political up-gradation. This research is an attempt to understand status of Pakistani women during Musharraf regime which is considered to be the era with maximum women representation in the parliament. Through this research, while using the ratio of cases of violence against women and women employability, it is investigated that whether maximum representation in the parliament really had some impacts on the socio-economic plight of Pakistani women.

Political Empowerment of Women in Pakistan: The 12th National Assembly (2002-7)

The beginning of 21st century brought two most significant changes in the country's history; firstly it was the electronic media's liberty and secondly the infusion of women in political



structure of the country. In 2002, after the general elections, Pakistan is regarded as a country with the most women friendly legislative assemblies because of its high percentage of women parliamentarians. (Khan, 2018) In elections 2002 women were elected for the parliament under two categories; on general seats through direct election, and on reserved seats through indirect election, because other than reserved seats for women, women were having the prospect to compete with men on general seats as well. Gen. Musharraf amended the constitution of Pakistan 1973 and increased the women quota in the National Assembly up to 17%. Due to the opportunity of contesting for the general seats a minority seat was also occupied by a woman Asiya Nasir which was an addition to female participation in the parliament (Noreen, Zakar, Ali & Yousaf, 2019).

Women on General Seats

NA is the abbreviation used for the constituencies of National Assembly and for general seats it starts from the constituency of Peshawar. N-1 Peshawar is the first constituency of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the last is NA-35 Malakand (General Elections Report, 2002), and not a single woman got elected from this area. Same was the case of FATA beginning from NA-36 and ending at NA-47 (General Elections Report, 2002), that no woman got succeeded on general seats from FATA. Similarly from Federal Capital Islamabad, NA-48 and NA-49 no woman could succeed on general seats (General Elections Report, 2002). In Punjab general seats start from NA-50 Rawalpindi 1 and end at NA-197 Rahim Yar Khan-VI. Here out of 148 total general seats only the following 8 seats were won by the women.

Constituencies in Punjab won by Women in General Elections 2002

Woman Parliamentarian	Constituency Number	Constituency Name
Sumera Malik	NA-69	Khushab-1
Ghulam Bibi	NA-87	Jhang-II
Saima Bharwana	NA-90	Jhang-V
Riffat Kahlon	NA-117	Narowal-III
Samina Ghurki	NA-130	Lahore-XIII
Rubina Watoo	NA-147	Okara-V
Khalida Qureshi	NA-176	Muzafargarh-I
Hina Khar	NA-177	Muzafargarh-II

(General Elections Report, 2002)

It is interesting to note that all these women belonged to politically influential families, with their male family members' active in Pakistani politics.

In Sindh general seats start from NA-198 Sakhar-1 and end at NA-258 Karachi-XX (General Elections Report, 2002). Here from 61 general seats only the following 3 were won by the women.

Constituencies in Sindh won by Women in General Elections 2002



Woman Parliamentarian	Constituency Number	Constituency Name
Azra Pechoho	NA-213	Nawabshah-1
Shamshad Sattar	NA-223	Hyderabad-VI
Fehmida Mirza	NA-225	Badin-II

(General Elections Report, 2002)

In Baluchistan general seats start from NA-259 Quetta and end at NA-272 Gawadar (General Elections Report, 2002). Out of 14 general seats only 1 seat was won by a woman.

Constituencies in Baluchistan won by Women in General Elections 2002

Woman Parliamentarian	Constituency Number	Constituency Name
Zubaida Jalal	NA-272	Gawadar

(General Elections Report, 2002)

It is interesting to note that people from Baluchistan and Sind are more prone to elect women as their political leaders than KP and FATA (Mumtaz and Shaheed, 1987).

Seats Reserved for Women

As discussed before that it was the earliest example of Pakistan's history that 22% seats were allocated to women in the Parliament, which caused some revolutionary impacts in the spell of empowering Pakistani women. The country witnessed a landmark increase in the influx of female politicians on reserved seats. The seats were reserved for women according to the general population of the province which are as follows:

1. Women seats for National Assembly were initiated from Punjab as general seats were started from KP (General Elections Report, 2002). 35 seats, NA-273 to NA-307 were reserved for women in Punjab (General Elections Report, 2002).

Reserved Constituencies in Punjab for Women in General Elections 2002

Woman Parliamentarian	Constituency Number	Constituency Name
Mehanz Rafi	NA-273	Punjab-1
Hajira Aziz	NA-274	Punjab-II
Tanzeela Cheema	NA-275	Punjab-III
Donia Aziz	NA-276	Punjab-IV
Kishmala Tariq	NA-277	Punjab-V
Saira Tariq	NA-278	Punjab-VI
Riffat Amjad	NA-279	Punjab-VII
Atiya Inayatullah	NA-280	Punjab-VIII
Bushra Rehman	NA-281	Punjab-IX
Ferzein Sarfraz	NA-282	Punjab-X
Umerzadi Tiwana	NA-283	Punjab-XI
Rahila Munawar	NA-284	Punjab-XII
Asiya Azeem	NA-285	Punjab-XIII



Firdaus Awan	NA-286	Punjab-XVIV
Tehmina Dasti	NA-287	Punjab-XV
Inaza Ihsan	NA-288	Punjab-XVI
Bushra Supra	NA-289	Punjab-XVII
Rozina Tufail	NA-290	Punjab-XVIII
Tahira Asif	NA-291	Punjab-XIX
Naheed Khan	NA-292	Punjab-XX
Neelam Hasnain	NA-293	Punjab-XXI
Shakeela Khanum	NA-294	Punjab-XXII
Fauzia Habib	NA-295	Punjab-XXIII
Mehreen Raja	NA-296	Punjab-XXIV
Yasmeen Rehman	NA-297	Punjab-XXV
Shehnaz Sheikh	NA-298	Punjab-XXVI
Rukhsana Bangash	NA-299	Punjab-XXVII
Naseem Akhtar	NA-300	Punjab-XXVIII
Samia Qazi	NA-301	Punjab-XXIX
Maimona Hashmi	NA-302	Punjab-XXX
Ishrat Ashraf	NA-303	Punjab-XXXI
Tehmina Daultana	NA-304	Punjab-XXXII
Rehana Mashadi	NA-305	Punjab-XXXIII
Meena Leghari	NA-306	Punjab-XXXIV
Ayla Malik	NA-307	Punjab-XXXV

(General Elections Report, 2002)

2. In Sindh 14 seats, from NA-308 to NA-321, were reserved for women.

Reserved Constituencies in Sindh for Women in General Elections 2002		
Women Parliamentarian	Constituency Number	Constituency Name
Fizza Junejo	NA-308	Sindh-I
Sherry Rehman	NA-309	Sindh-II
Ruqaya Somro	NA-310	Sindh-III
Fauzia Wahab	NA-311	Sindh-IV
Rubina Kaimkhani	NA-312	Sindh-V
Nafeesa Raja	NA-313	Sindh-VI
Shagufta Jamani	NA-314	Sindh-VII
Farida Siddqui	NA-315	Sindh-VIII
Kaneez Munawar	NA-316	Sindh-IX
Shamim Akhtar	NA-317	Sindh-X



Afsar Begum	NA-318	Sindh-XI
Shabeena Talat	NA-319	Sindh-XII
Gul Farkhanda	NA-320	Sindh-XIII
Khurshid Afghan	NA-321	Sindh-XIV

(General Elections Report, 2002)

3. In KP 7 seats, from NA-322 to NA-329, were reserved for women.

Reserved Constituencies in KP for Women in General Elections 2002

Woman Parliamentarian	Constituency Number	Constituency Name
Zaib Gohar Ayub	NA-322	NWFP-I
Syeda Farkhanda Khalid	NA-323	NWFP-II
Razia Aziz	NA-324	NWFP-III
Nayer Sultana	NA-325	NWFP-IV
Jamila Ahmad	NA-326	NWFP-V
Ambreen Naeem	NA-327	NWFP-VI
Inayat Begum	NA-328	NWFP-VII
Shahida Akhtar	NA-329	NWFP-VIII

(General Elections Report, 2002)

4. In Baluchistan 3, from NA-330 to NA-332, were reserved for women.

Reserved Constituencies in Baluchistan for Women in General Elections 2002

Woman Parliamentarian	Constituency Number	Constituency Name
Noor Jahan Panezai	NA-330	Baluchistan-I
Bilqees Saif	NA-331	Baluchistan-II
Imrana Khawar	NA-332	Baluchistan-III

(General Elections Report, 2002)

Political Empowerment of Women 1999-2007

The global tendencies of gender equality and women empowerment have always compelled the power structure in Pakistan to inculcate women in political cadres formally, and to combat women's invisibility from the political scenario, constitutions in Pakistan have always preserved the prerequisite of reserved seats for women since throughout the country's history. But the most significant step was taken by Gen. Pervez Musharraf during his regime as the chief executive of Pakistan, when he increased women quota at all levels of governance (Butt & Shahid, 2012). Before the general elections of 2002 the women quota for parliament and provincial assemblies was increased to 22%, which was limited to 10 seats under the 1973 constitution and was increased to 20 seats in 1985 under Gen. Zia-ul-Haq's military regime (Shaheed, 1998). Nevertheless, following three general elections in 1977, 1985, and 1988, this representational quota for women expired in 1988 (Noreen & et. al, 2019). Presently 22% reserved seats in parliament and provincial assemblies do not equate the proportion of women population of the country which is around half of the total population but still 60 seats in National Assembly and



17 seats in Senate are a step forward for women participation in the mainstream politics of the country(Noreen & et. al, 2019).

National Assemblies of Pakistan and their Female Membership

National Assemblies	Female Members
1 st Constituent & National Assembly 1947	2
National Assembly 1962-65	8
National Assembly 1965-69	6
National Assembly 1971-77	6
National Assembly 1977-79	10
National Assembly 1985-88	22
National Assembly 1988-90	24
National Assembly 1990-93	2
National Assembly 1993-96	4
National Assembly 1996-99	6
National Assembly 2002-07	74
National Assembly 2008-13	66
National Assembly 2013-18	70
National Assembly 2018-23	70

(PILDAT, 2004)

Since its inception in 1973, Senate of Pakistan has never increased its female membership from one or two member till 2003, when it raised to 17 women members (PILDAT, 2004). In present Senate of Pakistan there are 20 women member (PILDAT, 2004). Article 34 of the constitution and Pakistan's international commitments to women's political liberation are in line with the seat reservation policy.

Women Empowerment during Musharraf Regime: Reverie or Reality?

To meet the modern global political trends Pakistan has introduced a broad range of legislative measures to liberate, decentralize and democratize the country, which needed to reconstruct the existing political system to achieve the target of transparent and accountable government which not only ensures involvement at all levels but also confirms long term development and social growth to achieve the goal of 'good governance'. This new trend of reforms reflects the change and shift from political, social and economic thinking patterns of the state and society to seek development (Jabeen & Jadoon, 2009). The new thinking pattern about socio-political and economic roles of the state and society is more based on gender equality for the greater cause of national progress and unity. Sustainable good governance is not possible without gender equality and equal opportunities to success as these two are acknowledged as the key strategies for development by the international development community (Awan, 2022).

After having a brief study of increased women participation in the assemblies the question arises about the strength of women as a gender that whether it increased or not. Unfortunately increased women quota in assembly representation could not strongly correlate to the strength of women in society. Even in some cases the representative women themselves were the victims of unfair stereotypes. Electronic media which also got liberated during the Musharraf regime promoted the stereotypical image of women politicians when it comes to their priority for inviting politicians as guests for their political shows (Zahra, 2012). Women politicians are often not the priority of media to be invited to speak on their party's behalf on a TV channel or perhaps it's the political parties who are reluctant to make these women the public face of the party. Women politicians are expected to play as second fiddle to their male colleagues. Another very important fact is that majority of the women politicians belong to politically influential families and they have earned their assembly seats because of the political influence of their male family members for example: Miss Benazir Bhutto, Dr. Fehmida Mirza, Miss Hina Rabbani Khar, Miss Tehmina Daultana, and Begum Nasim Wali Khan. Therefore media also differentiates between women parliamentarians on the basis of their family background and social class (Hameed, 2021). Women politicians belonging to influential families are given more media coverage than their other female colleagues. Similarly women politicians who are elected on reserved seats are considered lesser parliamentarians than their colleagues regardless of the fact that majority of them have been more active in standing committees than their male counterparts.

Violence against Women 1999-2007

We can't deny from the fact that violence and gender discrimination against women is a universal phenomenon but its intensity varies from society to society and culture to culture. In under-developed societies like Pakistan, strong hold of traditional and structural arrangements portraying women as inferior creatures reflects discrimination against women in almost every sphere of life. The role of extrinsic (i.e. power structure, patriarchy, economic set up and authority and social support network, etc.) and intrinsic (personal and biological i.e. age, personality, influence, income, education and undue acquiescence to interpersonal violence, etc.) factors shapes the future and status of women in the society. (Shahid, 2010) Violence under the cloak of social order is one of the most significant intrinsic factor which is used in societies like Pakistan to curb the female vocals chanting for their rights. Violence against women could be defined as sexually, psychologically and physically intimidating acts by their male partners (Ali & Gavino, 2008). It can be related as an abusive behavior producing out of male domination not only on the economical structure of the society but all the public and private domains of the society as well. The pervasiveness of domestic violence is manifested by socio-politico-cultural practices based on gender bias (Khan, 2009). Another bitterly insensitive perspective of violence against women is 'honor killing' which is still persistent in the Pakistani society besides being the country with encouraging political representation of women in the legislation making process. It's the socio-cultural tradition in urban and rural areas equally, in which women or even



the young girls are killed by their family, neighbors or any-other male member of the society for being suspected of having illicit or extra marital relations. To kill such women is considered legal by the society and often the murderer is forgiven by the family of the murdered woman. In rural areas such cases are brought to *Jirga*, (a tribal mechanism for justice, comprised of few notables of the locality to resolve the dispute) which does not demand for sound witness or proof for the judgment to kill the accused woman (Khan, 2009). Therefore the victims of such violence and honor killing are usually women. Following table mirrors the ratio and pattern of violence against women from 2000 onwards.

Cases of Violence against Women in Pakistan 2000-2004							
Year	Murder	Rape	Domestic Torture	Honor Killing	Burn Cases	Abduction	Suicide
2000	386	404	317			690	638
2001	1422	576	1195	736	311	1255	1053
2002	1583	984	1570	803	240	1404	1112
2003	1636	1030	1920	930	380	1759	1412
2004	1468	1047	1600	870	310	1397	1327

(Research and Documentation Center of Madadgaar, 2012)

These yearly accelerating numbers of cases of violence against women reflect that besides all the measures to upgrade women politically and providing media the right to express and show the society their real picture we need to travel a long road towards gender equality and women empowerment. The family backgrounds of the female politicians, biased coverage priorities of media, social structure and women's ignorance about their rights being a human and a woman are all the factors which contribute in sabotaging all the efforts to empower women.

Women Employability (1999-2007)

In under-developed societies women are usually considered born to be home-makers, which is not false partially as usually women have some biological instincts that make them far better home makers than men but it's not just the area where women can prove their skills. Since past few decades women have proved themselves much skillful, and suitable for many professions which were previously considered as men's vicinity. From flying airplane to driving auto-*rikshaw*, from being scientist to working as nurse or from being business woman to home maker every field have been rocked by women. But unfortunately Pakistan is still lacking in this area of women empowerment. Besides the fact that the cases of violence against women have increased another important social angle is the employability of women which has not increased to a sufficient level. Women have still less jobs than men due to the extrinsic and intrinsic factors discussed before.

Employment in Pakistan 1999-2006 (in millions)			
Year	Pakistan	Urban	Rural



	Both	Male	Female	Both	Male	Female	Both	Male	Female
1999-00	36.3	31.21	5.08	10.07	9.19	0.87	26.23	21.98	4.24
2001-02	38.9	33.19	5.69	12.2	11.00	1.22	26.7	22.19	4.47
2003-04	42.00	34.69	7.06	13.1	11.76	1.35	28.6	22.93	5.71
2005-06	46.94	37.81	9.13	14.46	12.80	1.66	32.48	25.01	7.47

(JICA & SDPI Final Report 2007-08)

The table clearly shows that women are still not the part of society's economic structure which in turn weakens the society itself, as if half of the population is not provided with an opportunity to have some means of earning than how one can expect economic development and prosperity of the society. The gulf of difference between male and female employability in the country clearly reflects that besides increase in women's political power, socially or economically women are still much less powerful than men.

Conclusion

Gen. Pervez Musharraf has been appreciated by many liberalists and social rights activists for his efforts to elevate the socio-economic and political standing of women and providing new opportunities for their empowerment. But the above discussion reveals that women's liberation in Musharraf's government was his effort to improve global image of Pakistan in international community instead of improving the socio-political and economic status of women in the society (Weiss, 2012). Actually, Gen. Musharraf used the stipulation of reserved seats for women as a strategy to enlarge his political potency and to promote women's ostensible partaking in political sphere. Because the mere statistical power of women in legislators is not enough to indicate gender equality but their influence and efficiency makes a difference (Women Issues PK Blogs, 2010). Women who succeed to get seats in National Assembly are just the symbolic representatives, who not only got elected because of their influential male family members but will also work according to their family's interests and instructions (Ahmed, 2002). The increased ratio of violence cases against women and the huge gap between the male and female employability mirrors the hollow nature of 'women empowerment' indoctrinated through 'moderated enlightenment' of the military dictator Gen. Pervez Musharraf. Mere numerical increase in reserved seats for women cannot bring the real change in the role and status of women in the society. It can only be achieved through the change in social discourse which operates the society to exclude women from all its spheres instead of including them. Women must be represented in all levels of public and private policy discussions and legislation that impact society, particularly women, in order to break down the gender binary. We can't be right in our policies if we leave half of the population to stay at home and face the domestic violence. Pakistan needs to empower its women not just to moderate its international image or to strengthen the political rule of any military dictator but to empower women for the sake of empowerment of the women, society, politics and economy of the country, because without empowering the most incredible half of the society no nation can rise to the heights of glory.



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