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The Role of Reserved Seats for Women's Representation in Pakistan

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Abstract

The local government system in Pakistan is examined in this paper. It looks at how women have been empowered by the Musharraf dictatorship and how their increased representation in legislatures has given them more clout. Women have always been underrepresented in politics due to the cultural mores and religious beliefs of prior nations. To empower and represent women, women should have thirty percent of parliamentary seats, in accordance with UN criteria. This significant increase was noted in Pakistan in the year 2000. Thirty-three percent of local assembly members and seventeen percent of seats in the province, the country, and the senate were assigned to women. Four thousand women were running for local body seats in the 2000–01 national elections. Approximately 55,000 women applied to run for municipal office in 2005. Pakistan's growing municipal sector has bolstered women's representation and empowerment.

Keywords: Pakistan, Local Government, Reserved Seats, Women's Representation

Introduction

The Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action are two important documents that support women's empowerment that were introduced during the UN Fourth World Conference on Women. These declarations recognize the importance of involving women in the decision-making process. It would reduce gender differences and increase their sense of self-worth. It is well known that without gender equality, democracy, and capable leadership, political institutions cannot be strengthened (Beijing Platform for Action and Development, 1995). International attention has been focused on gender inequality in politics. Women's participation has been restricted both domestically and globally. Rather than being the consequence of incapacity, this was brought about by the pervasive culture of political discrimination and intellectual barriers that denied women the right to equal participation.

One kind of grassroots governance that meets community requirements is local government. It describes how locals work as representative bodies on issues that affect the community. Supervising a comparatively small area, a local government is an extension of a larger national or regional government. In essence, the system is a subordinate body. It assigns responsibilities and power to lower levels of government (Wilson, 2011). All forms of labor with a hierarchical structure are included. It lays the groundwork for group decision-making, citizen-to-citizen interaction, local public service delivery, and state participation. With this structure, the national government retains all of its jurisdiction and merely places specific restrictions on the local government, thereby turning it into an extension of itself. It suggests that publicly elected councils are in charge of local affairs and services even when they are acting within their administrative jurisdiction (Jackson, 1965). Managing matters that affect the local population falls under the purview of the local government. Local government is the foundation of democracy because it establishes democracy at the local level and gives the people a say in how their community is administered (Ziring, 1966). Local government is the term used to describe decentralized governance. Decentralization is the process of dividing up authority

across national, state, and local government organizations in order to establish a framework for sharing accountability that is founded on the subsidiary concept. This raises the bar and enhances governance overall while bolstering the ability and authority of subnational government (UNDP, 2016).

The local government system in Pakistan is examined in this paper. It looks at how women have been empowered by the Musharraf dictatorship and how their increased representation in legislatures has given them more clout. Women have always been underrepresented in politics due to the cultural mores and religious beliefs of prior nations. To empower and represent women, women should have thirty percent of parliamentary seats, in accordance with UN criteria. This significant increase was noted in Pakistan in the year 2000. Thirty-three percent of local assembly members and seventeen percent of seats in the province, the country, and the senate were assigned to women. Four thousand women were running for local body seats in the 2000–01 national elections. Approximately 55,000 women applied to run for municipal office in 2005. Pakistan's growing municipal sector has bolstered women's representation and empowerment. The project is built upon a quantitative methodology, secondary social impact research, objective descriptive reasoning, secondary data sources, and an APA-style bibliography.

Literature Review

The secondary sources of information were used. Review materials on women's empowerment, the Pakistani context, and local government institutions are widely available. "Local government" has been defined by Ziring (1966), Jackson (1965), and Wilson (2011). Jabeen (2019) claims that women's participation, representation, and empowerment in Pakistan's local government system have always received a lot of attention. Khattak (2010) has provided an account of Musharraf's Devolution Power Plan and its impact on women in local and federal administration. She gave a brief overview of the history of female representation in local government in Pakistan. Mumtaz (2005) concurred that increasing women's empowerment inside Pakistan's political system would be difficult without a system of female quotas. She is in favor of women going into politics given some encouraging trends. According to Bari (2001) and Zia (2009), reserved seats for women are currently considered a given when it comes to representation at the municipal and higher levels in Pakistan. A thorough description of the number of seats that women have gained in Pakistan's local government system may be found in Yazdani (2004). She also discussed the difficulties faced by women who vote and run for public office. The percentage of women in local government has increased as a result of reserved seats, according to Bates (2014), and the electoral system significantly contributes to the empowerment of women. Reserved seats have raised the percentage of women in politics, according to SPDC (2007).

The paper is divided into seven sections. The first section, the Introduction, provides a brief definition of "local government," the goals of the study, its methodology, its research hypothesis, and a review of relevant literature. The second section provides definitions of equality and female empowerment. The third section provides a brief overview of Pakistani local government history and discusses the

attempts made by military regimes to transfer authority at the local level. The fourth is Musharraf's recommendation to offer women more seats and authority. Local government elections take place in the fifth year, after one-third of the seats have been distributed. Six discussions about the main changes. This is the study's final conclusion.

Gender Equality and Empowerment

Men and women are equals when it comes to gender. Everyone has equal opportunity aside from gender differences. Men and women must equally contribute to and benefit from political advancement in order for there to be gender equality. The following is the definition of gender equality: Society values men and women equally, despite the fact that they perform distinct tasks (Barth, Reisel, & Ostbakken, 2023). A social process known as empowerment promotes personal initiative and organization so that communities can be governed by groups. Empowerment is the capacity to work with others to effect change, not the acquisition of control over them (Stein, 1997). Another complex effect of empowerment is the redistribution of power across people, groups, communities, classes, races, and nations. Empowerment is widely viewed as a powerful instrument for attaining sustainable development and better living conditions (Tripathi, 2011). It has to do with the process and outcome, aiming for a relatively high degree of societal influence (Staples, 1990). Women's empowerment is the process of renegotiating traditional norms and ideals, as well as expectations surrounding male and female roles, relationships, and tasks. Women now have more opportunities in the community, state, and civil society thanks to this tactic (Saigol, 2011).

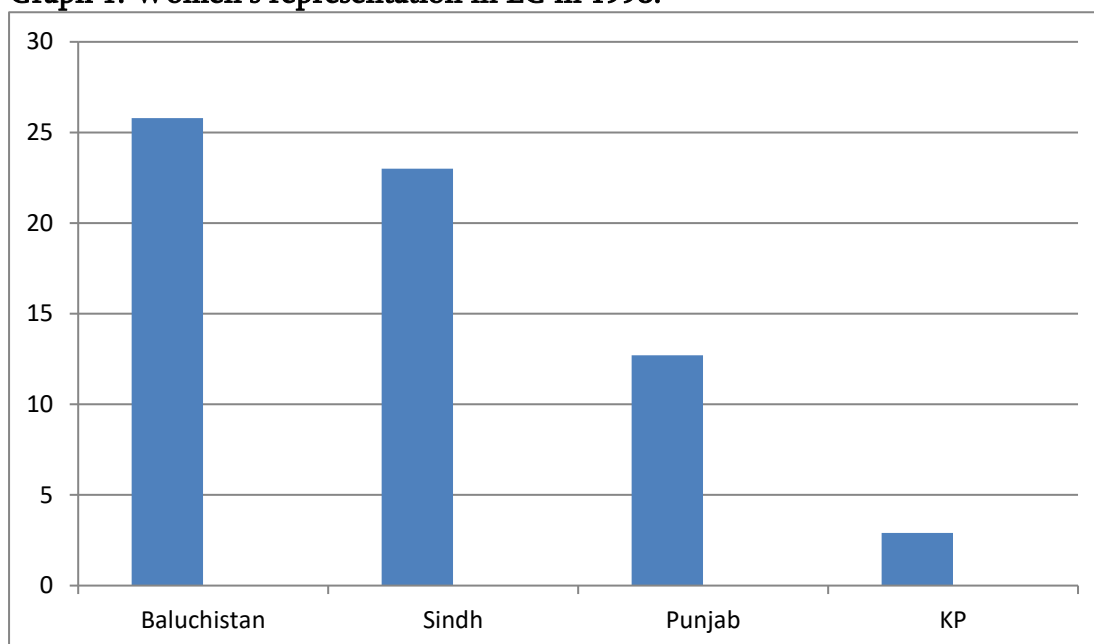
A comfortable place of work, the ability to influence employment and business opportunities, access to financial resources, representation in political and decision-making bodies, possession of all the fundamental rights outlined in the constitution, and additional benefits backed by international agreements, treaties, and conventions are just a few ways it is defined. Because power is socially constructed and unequally distributed, women need to make informed and progressive decisions in both the home and the wider community. More empowered women are more adept at evaluating the situation, setting priorities, resolving problems, and taking charge of their own life. In spite of this, women will always occupy marginal positions in society until they are given a say in how public policy is developed and decisions are made at all governmental, social, and economic levels. Until then, they won't be regarded as powerful (Huq & Shohid, 2016).

Brief History of Local government in Pakistan

Pakistan's local government system was formed by the British, but it received little support from the democratic government that came to power following the country's independence. Ayub Khan created the Basic Democracies System (BDs) with the enactment of the Basic Democracies Order (BDO) in 1959. Even with initiatives to grant local governments more power, the system was hampered by an onerous bureaucracy (Friedman, 1960). Z.A. Bhutto advocated the Peoples' Local Government systems, but the idea was never implemented. From 1972 to 1977, there were no local body elections. Zia-ul-Haq revived the local government system and

established a new one with the passage of the Local Government Ordinance, 1979. There were three election years: 1987, 1983, and 1979. In 1998, the federal government declared that local government would grow by 100%. For example, the proportion of women's seats in Punjab's town and district councils increased by a pitiful 3.7 percent (905 to 1,368). The pattern was also evident in other provinces. Despite the elections, these elected lawmakers never took office, and the system seldom ever functioned at all throughout this period. Graph 1 shows the proportion of women serving in local government in 1998.

Graph 1: Women's representation in LG in 1998:



Source: (Jabeen, The Local Government system of Pakistan: Participation, Representation and Empowerment of Women, 2019)

Another attempt to enhance governance by establishing local government units was the Devolution Plan of 2000. Its main objective was to bring about true democracy within the state. The National Reconstruction Bureau (NRB) recommended three levels of government: District Council, Tehsil Council, and Union Council. In addition, a host of additional institutions were suggested, such as citizen community boards, Musalihat Anjuman, and village councils (Anjum, 2001). The primary duty of the municipal government is to provide public services. Evaluating the performance of local government is its goal. It is crucial to assess the amount of labor needed to deliver these public services to the general public. Concerns for community development, agriculture, health, and education fall under the purview of the local government. For instance, after the devolution plan was implemented, the local government in the Sargodha area was divided into three levels: the Union Council, the Town Committee, and the area Council. Village Council, Citizen Community Boards, and Musalihat Anjuman were the grassroots groups. The Local Government Ordinance, 2001 contained the measures that granted local government authority and accountability (Cheema, 2005).

In August 2018, a new government was ushered in when Imran Khan was appointed prime minister of Pakistan. Punjab's Local Government Act (LGA) of 2019 established a new framework. By abolishing the current local government units, the Act gave the Punjab government the power to hold elections for the creation of new local governments until April 2020. The divide between rural and urban areas was reinstated with the establishment of Tehsil Councils for rural areas and Metropolitan/Municipal/Town Corporations/Committees for urban areas (Malik, 2019).

Musharraf's Devolution Plan

The democratically elected government was overthrown by military dictator General Pervez Musharraf on October 12, 1999. He unveiled the Devolution of Power Plan, a decentralized power structure, in January 2000. In a piece on this suggestion, Yazdani stated, "Many events in Pakistan's political history have led to changes in its democratic discourses for better or worse; one of them was in October 1999, which proved to be a blow to Pakistan's democratic journey but also a blessing in disguise for women." (Yazdani, 2004). After a round of local government elections, the devolution of power plan was put into effect in September 2001. To give local communities more authority, the National Reconstruction Bureau (NRB) was founded. Among its various objectives was the principal goal of uplifting women and other oppressed groups. The National Reconstruction Bureau (NRB) recommended the Local Government Plan in 2000, and provincial governments formally put it into effect on August 14, 2001. One notable aspect of the Local Administration Ordinance (LGO) of 2001 was the allocation of thirty-three percent of local government seats to women (National Reconstruction Bureau(2002), 2010). Union councils made the direct selection of these positions, while district and tehsil councils made the indirect choice. The Musharraf regime established the permanent National Commission on Status of Women (NCSW) in 2000 to bolster Pakistan's international commitments and the long-running civil society groups advocating for women's emancipation. Like previous traditions, Musharraf's military government went above and beyond to assist women, especially in the face of decisions made by democratically elected governments to disregard them. At the federal level, there were seventeen Senate seats and sixty National Assembly reserved seats.

The revised seat distribution not only empowered the women but also raised Pakistan's profile in the field of gender empowerment. Three to ten percent of the seats were reserved for women in prior years. The 1973 Constitution set aside ten seats for women for a term of ten years or three general elections, whichever occurred first. It was thought that in this amount of time, women would learn the necessary skills and be able to compete with men for general seats, negating the need for special accommodations.

This calculation proved to be inaccurate, and once this section was removed in 1988, women's representation in all subsequent elections was negligible. During this era of transition, campaigns for reserved seats articulated a variety of viewpoints, but none offered supporting data. They acknowledged that Pakistani women and society were still behind those in industrialized countries, but they also expressed a

reluctance to accept pragmatic society's norms since they thought they restricted the roles that women could play in society (Jabeen & Awan, Gender Quotas as an Instrument for Women's Empowerment in Legislature, 2017).

Because the reserved seats boosted women's standing, most women supported the devolution plan. Human rights organizations and gender activists have always championed women's rights. Women in Pakistan have fought for reserved seats for nearly seven decades; the first quota judgments were issued in 1935, and the most recent ones were made in 2002 (Krook, 2009). Reservation policies had a remarkable impact on women's empowerment, as seen by the high ratio of female voters. The majority of funds are allocated to the community's drinking water projects, medical facilities, and road upgrades. Elected women devote more of their time and energy to issues that directly impact women and strive harder to pass laws in local assemblies that support women's emancipation. They have been vocal about their problems and have been making an effort to fit into the existing political and administrative system, despite having a low literacy rate.

Elections of local government

There were five separate election cycles for the three levels of local government (naib nazim/vice-mayor and nazim/mayor) between December 2000 and August 2001. Defying recommendations from religious authorities to refrain from entering politics because of their cultural and religious convictions, 2,621 women ran for 1,867 reserved seats in the first round of the election. Female candidates won election with no opposition in 40% of districts (Bari, 2001). In this round, women won every seat that was assigned to them, regardless of whether they were peasants or laborers. The main feature of the parliament was that more than half of the elected women were first-time public office candidates (Ryes, 2002). When it became apparent that the newly elected female councilors needed training, a number of national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and government institutions organized workshops. In these elections, 39,964 seats were reserved especially for women. Table 1 lists the specific seats reserved for women in these elections.

Table 1: Reserved Seats for Women in all Tiers of Local Government Elections 2000-01

| Tier | No. of Councils | Total Seats | Reserves Seats for Women | Percentage of Women Seats |
|------------------|------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Union Council | 6022 | 126,462 | 36,066 | 28.5 |
| Town Council | 30 | 773 | 161 | 20.8 |
| Tehsil Council | 305 | 8,192 | 1,749 | 21.4 |
| District Council | 96 | 8,806 | 1,988 | 22.6 |

Source: (Mirza, 2002)

Although women's success rates in these elections were 90% in each of the five phases, the last phase's addition of Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP)

resulted in results that were just 65%. Religion had an impact on the way women were portrayed in the tribe in addition to tribal culture. Even Mullahs issued fatwas criticizing women's participation. This reality was also recognized by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP, 2002), which connected it to the conservatism that governed KP and Baluchistan, where men in the family forbade their wives from casting ballots. Thirty municipal committees were filled to capacity, but Punjab showed a more encouraging trend with 97% of its seats occupied.

96% of the seats of the tehsil council were occupied. 95.8% of district council members and 95.8% of town council voters. Sindh's result was also in the positive. Nearly 40,000 women joined local bodies altogether at this time, according to estimates from the Local Government Ordinance (LGO). In the previous system, there were roughly 17,400 female participants. Even if there were a few problems and some of the reserved seats weren't filled, the shift was noticeable and offered a fantastic chance for women's empowerment. The 67,000 women who put in nominations, demonstrating that families and communities welcomed women in this new role, also spoke to a transformation in society. Adult universal suffrage was employed in this system to select Nazim and Naib nazim.

Members of district councils comprised the Nazim of union councils, whereas members of taluka/tehsil councils were by default the Naib nazim. In addition, they served as an electoral college for selecting the Nazim and Naib nazim of the district council in addition to members of the reserved seats at all three levels (Syed, Tabassum, & Tabassum, 2015). The districts for the 2000–2001 election are listed in Table 2 for each of the five stages.

Table 2: Number of Districts in Five Phases of Elections 2000-01

| Phases | First Phase | Second Phase | Third Phase | Fourth Phase | Fifth Phase |
|------------------|-------------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|----------------|
| Date of Election | December 31, 2000 | March 21, 2001 | May 31, 2001 | July 2, 2001 | August 9, 2001 |
| Total Districts | 18 | 20 | 20 | 31 | 11 |
| Baluchistan | 03 | 02 | 03 | 11 | 03 |
| KP | 04 | 04 | 01 | 07 | 08 |
| Sindh | 03 | 04 | 07 | 05 | --- |
| Punjab | 08 | 10 | 09 | 08 | --- |

Source: (Election Commission of Pakistan, 2001)

Fundamental Changes

Reluctant to give up control over resources and authority to local authorities, the four province administrations sought substantial changes to the Local Government Ordinance (LGO) before the next elections. On June 6, 2005, the Local Government Ordinance (LGO) underwent its final amendment as a result of the national government's rejection. The overall number of seats on a union council was

reduced from twenty-one to thirteen, and the number of seats reserved for women was reduced from six to four. However, the quota seats were still distributed proportionately. The overall decline in union councils from 36,066 to 24,528 had a substantial impact on the percentage of women who were able to achieve self-empowerment (Aurat Foundation).

To try to reduce this participation gap, however, more women than ever before filed to run for general seats in 2001. Women wanted to cling to the achievements and labors of the preceding twenty years. The total number of nominations was 61,411, or 1.7 percent, in 2001; by 2005, however, it had dropped to 57,275, or 2.3 percent (Khattak, 2010). Very few seats in the district and tehsil councils were vacant, not even in Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Since it was the only thing that could increase their strength, women were determined to keep their representation. Many of the former female councilors joined political parties in an attempt to win support for the 2005 elections, and several influential political groups denounced both the military government and the distribution of women's seats. They conveyed their annoyance at the criticism and made it clear that they wanted to hold onto their position of authority in order to avoid being held responsible for their decision to not run for public office or cast a ballot in next elections.

Local government legislation mandates that non-party voting be used for the elections in 2001 and 2005. The favorable results of the 2005 elections increased the opportunities for women to engage in local politics. Following the first round of voting, 98.3% of the reserved seats in the union councils in 54 districts were filled. 56 districts, or 96% of the reserved seats, were challenged in the election rerun.

Several non-governmental organizations (NGOs) coordinated the election mobilization of 156,925 women, the mentorship of 112,298 women in camps for facilitation, and the training of 40,178 female candidates, among other achievements. NGOs also helped women register to vote and get national identity cards (NICs) (Zia, 2009). In general, women's advancement and representation were considerably affected by the 2005 seat reduction. There is a huge difference between the entire people and the one elected female member when this country is compared to others. One-woman council is equivalent to one thousand individuals in India. The ratio is one to 400 in Nepal. In Pakistan, there are roughly 8,000 men for every woman (SPDC, 2007).

Conclusion

This paper's extensive analysis and evidence-based research have demonstrated how local government is more approachable, empathetic, and sensitive to local needs. It is a proven fact that women have not been included in classrooms with the same rights as men since antiquity. Their rights to empowerment, autonomy, and gender equality have been disregarded. The cultural norms and intellectual beliefs of these ancient societies are the root cause of prejudice against women. Women are not regarded equally as equal members of society in the political, economic, and social spheres due to these cultural norms and ideological views. Women's power was limited in politics. It was forbidden for men to be equally represented in politics. It is

obvious that, in a democratic world, women's political representation and empowerment are essential to democracy and good administration. From this vantage point, UN guidelines recommended giving women 30% of parliamentary seats in order to empower and represent women. This startling development was seen in Pakistan in 2000. In Pakistan, women make up 33% of local government seats but just 17% of those in the National Assembly, Senate, and Provincial/National Assemblies. Forty thousand women nationwide ran for local government positions in 2000–01. Approximately 55,000 women applied to run for municipal office in 2005. Women's empowerment and representation have been strengthened by Pakistan's expanding municipal sector. The Local Government Ordinance of 2005 had a detrimental impact on women's representation and empowerment because it gave women fewer seats. But women made an effort to close this disparity by becoming more active in politics; in comparison to 2001, more of them declared their candidacies for general seats. As a result, the entire experience has shown that locals, men and women alike, ought to establish and alter local governments in line with their own objectives and life experiences.

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