



Women's Empowerment in PMLN and PPP Governments: A Comparative Analysis (1988- 2025)

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ABSTRACT

Despite women's strides in the political arena since Pakistan's inception, it still needs reforms. Both the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and the Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) are focusing on enacting laws for women's empowerment. The Pakistan Peoples Party came into power on multiple occasions. With this long political tenure of both political parties, this study traces the intricacies inherent in women's discrimination and the need for constitutional rights. This study weighs up the undertaken legislative measures of both Political parties in order to safeguard women's interests. While applying interpretation with the Qualitative method, this study explores results, contrasts and compares their policies with a systematic approach. This research examines the differences and similarities found between these two main political parties' manifestos and achievements. The consequential findings disclosed that the Party's manifestos and implementation of policies played a vital role in regulating women's representation and safeguarding their rights. This study compared the senatorial efforts for women's empowerment implemented by the PPP and PMLN from 1988 to 2025. Using the parties' official papers, policy of statements, Newspapers and scholarly analysis, this research investigates the performance of both political parties while addressing the hindrances faced by them on their way to attaining women's rights. The results indicated that the PMLN government carried off mostly their party commitments as compare to the PPP.

Key words: Gender Equality, Manifestoes, PML(N), PPP, Empowerment.

INTRODUCTION

Political Parties are crucial for organizing democracies and shaping the structure of legislatures. (Mainwaring & Scully, 1995). Women's participation in the political arena paved the way to change the customs, rules and shape the attitudes of male members (Sacchet, 2005). In equitable governments, equal importance is given

to Women's and Men's representation in lawmaking (Claros & Zahidi, 2005). To encourage women, Pakistan also worked for women's participation in decision-making under Article 7, National Plan of Action, 1998, National Policy for Development, Empowerment of Women, 2002 and fundamental provisions of the National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) Article 34 (Bari, 2005). Women, with 49.6% of the total population in Pakistan are facing cultural, religious, economic, educational, and social harassment and patriarchal system obstacles in attaining political entity. Significant steps were taken to enact laws to increase their (CEDAW) number in the National and Provincial Assembly but their 17% reservations in the National Assembly did not give them adequate exercise of power. The progressive social media role and international scope of women's pivotal participation in Politics also stimulated Pakistan's political parties to work for women's political legislation. It is complicated to verify a party in South Asia on the concept of their ideology, right, left and centre as is done in the West. They are known as nationalist, socialist, democratic, pragmatic and egalitarian. Therefore, some party leaders state that they belong to an egalitarian party and do not pursue any ideology (Suri, 2007). In Pakistan, the leading Political Party, Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), is known as Center-Left- Left and PML-N is taken as Center right (Caul, 1999). It is seen in Western writings that the parties with the centre and left values mostly are the supporters and promoters of gender equality (Norris, 1993). Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N), both Major Political Parties, took initiatives to protect women's rights. This study will examine their legislative measures in shape of comparing them.

Pakistan Peoples Party and Women Empowerment:

Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, as the founder of PPP, established a party in 1967 with a new political thinking that was a mixture of Islamic socialism and equality. In the 1970 election, participated with the manifesto of "Roti, Kapra and Makaan (Mahesar, Shuja and Jaleel Sabahat). In the 1970 general elections, his party placed a successful position in agriculturally rich regions. Z.A Bhutto's success in elections with this manifesto was only because of Ayub Khan's policies of concentrating the economic prosperity on only a group of society. Under the leadership of Benazir Bhutto, the Party turned its manifesto from Islamic Socialism (Ahmad et al., 2022). Electoral manifestoes decide the party's vision, policies and help the voters to judge the political parties through their documented policies to finalize their vote and assess the implementation of their promises (Dalton & Farrell, 2011). Benazir Bhutto's victory in the 1988 elections stimulated the hope of women to be empowered, as for in the history, the first time a female was elected with 38.52 percent votes and got 93 seats in the National Assembly. Contrary to this, women representation in the National Assembly was limited to only 24, and their numbers in the Provincial Assembly were fourteen. The women organization's expectations also turned into disappointment when no any concrete steps were taken, even to amend the legislation passed in Zia's period that were considered deleterious for female uplift actions in several ways. Charles H. Kennedy expressed his views: "Benazir's

government has done little to hinder the operation of the Nizam –i- Mustapha as implemented by Zia. Her administration has not dismantled the Federal Shariat Court nor the Shariat Appellate Bench of the Supreme Court. Neither has it rescinded the Hudood Ordinance, nor challenged the implementation of the Ramzan Ordinance, nor curbed the activities of the Council of Islamic Ideology” (Kennedy 1990,76).

It was the need of the hour to repeal the unjust laws of Zia ul Haq's time, although it was inscribed in the party's manifesto of 1988 (Ziring,1991,182). Her Premiership had to face strong opposition from Punjab, even if she might accomplish her plan. Weiss reviews the representation of women in her regime, as lawmakers and administrators were limited. “Aside from herself and her mother, only one other woman was given a PPP ticket to run for a National Assembly seat, and few women were given Provincial Assembly tickets. No women were initially given ministerial portfolios, although this was reversed on March 23, 1989, when Benazir expanded the federal cabinet to 43 members, including five women. Of the 24 ministers, only one –her mother, who is a minister without portfolio, is a woman. Of the 19 ministers of state, four are women” (Weiss 1990, p. 437). Some slight, insignificant measures for the empowerment of women were adopted, which did not bring any kind of revolution or upgrade the condition of this gender. These trivial steps were to pinpoint the women-related distinct, humiliating laws during Zia's regime. Further, for the lucrative purpose, facilitate them with employment in both economic sectors (Awan 2018, p. 369). Ultimately, a report of discriminatory laws was issued, but no any immediate action was taken on it. Likewise, the establishment of Women Development Bank, which is aimed to financially empower them, was limited in nature only the urban areas were the cog of vintage and failed to provide economic benefits to rural women. It would have been more effective if it worked on the same pattern of ‘Graneen Bank’ established in Bangladesh that facilitates the poor women to get a loan to run their own business (Khandker, Baqui & Zahed 1995). Moreover, deprived female prisoners were tranquilized from sentence under her first tenure. She allowed women to become part of a trade union to uplift their social status (Weiss 1990, 435).

In her second term (1993-1996), on the same pattern, promises were made for the radical steps for women empowerment with 5% quota in the Public and semi-government sectors, reinstating their seats in Provincial and National Assemblies, forming a female police force and designating women lawyers in the high judiciary. Once again, PPP promised to effectuate all plans related to women and repeal the unjust discriminative laws. Contrary to the 1988 elections, the PPP had to form a coalition with PML(Junejo group), with 37.85% votes, and acquired 89 seats. (Amin 1994,195).The internal and external factors drew her attention, such as “domestic political strife, an economic recession described by some economists as the worst in 30 years, international terrorism and international flashpoints on both its eastern and western border” (La Porte 1996, 179). Issuance of meager amount in Primary Health Care and Family Planning was made in the budget that was surged than

before “for health from Rs 1539 million in 1993-94 to Rs. 2.430 billion in 1994-95, representing an overall increase of 58%. The important fact is that the development allocation has been enhanced by about 15%” (Awan, 2018). However, Benazir Bhutto justified her performance regarding women in her autobiography disclosed the steps she took the endorsement the United Nations ‘*Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women*’ and the other initiative was the set up of the *Women Development Ministry*. She got the honour to host the *Muslim Women’s Olympics* in Pakistan and appointed women Judges and family courts. Moreover, she boots to establish a female police station. She states:“(Her).... government established special police station to give confidence to women to report crimes committed against them, as well as appointed women Judges for the first time to the high courts of the country, we established family courts headed by women Judges to hear issues related to child custody and family issues” (Bhutto 2007, p. 414-415). Further, for the women the towns and villages of Pakistan in Health and family planning(Building) 30,000 new primary and secondary schools”(Bhutto,206).

Benazir Bhutto was assassinated in 2007, and her party, for the third time elected in 2008 and formed a government. At that time, women’s representation at the Provincial and National level increased to 76 women in the National Assembly and 74 women were elected in the Provincial Assembly. During the PPP 5 5-year tenure, 2008-2013, a lot of regulations were passed at the centre. For Example, the *Protection against Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2010, Prevention of Anti-women Practices, 2011, Acid Control and Acid Crime Prevention Bill, 2011, Women in Distress and Detention Funds (amendment)Act, 2011, Domestic Violence (prevention and protection) Act, 2012*.

These laws enacted imprisonment and fines of 500 to one million, some biased anti-social activities such as *Wanni, Swara*, forceful marriage with the Quran and not to give privilege for getting inheritance. For imprisoned women who did not defend their case, special funds were allocated for them. In addition, *Benazir Income Support Programme*(BISP), with the aim of providing financial help on a monthly basis, was provided to low income, deprived families. (Awan 2022, p. 372-73).In the 2013 election campaign, PPP commitments regarding women empowerment and gender equality were added as their manifestos with the titles ‘*People’s Work Programme*’ and ‘*Power to Women*’. It is described :

<p>Gender Equality in the Economic Sphere:</p> <p>“Will expand women entrepreneurship and rural women farmers”(p.28)</p> <p>“Home-based women workers, fair pay and fair job policy for women” (p.28)</p>	<p>Gender Equality in Social Sphere:</p> <p>“Cut maternal and infant mortality rates by 60%(p.15&18)</p> <p>“Promote family planning services.”(p.20)</p> <p>Customary violence</p> <p>“Pro-women laws related to honor killing, gang, rape,acid burn victim,inheritance,</p>
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<p>“Increase women participation in workplace”(p.24) Increase the job quota for women up to 20% (p.28)</p>	
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In the 2018 elections, PPP committed in its manifesto to increase women’s reserved seats from 17% to 33% and include them in all Public level decision-making positions. To curb anti-social practices, female police stations will be established. Interest-free loan, ‘Benazir women agriculture works programme under zari inqalabi’ ‘Bhook Mitao Programme’ to economical strong the women. For promoting education at the primary and secondary level stipend scholarship would be given to girls. For women’s health training for lady health workers and paramedical staff would be provided (Ayesha & Farhat, N, Institute of Policy Studies). Unless PPP showed their commitment to gender equality in their 2013 and 2018 manifestos. But could not able to win these both elections. The matter of fact is that after Benazir's demise party was in the hands of her husband, Asif Ali Zardari, who was not a popular leader, not even in the good book of the people of Pakistan, worked as Co-Chairman, and Bilawal Bhutto Zardari became Chairman of the Pakistan Peoples Party. After her assassination, the people of Pakistan, as a reward for her services, cast votes in favour of her. Despite the masses' hope, PPP under the presidentship of Zardari failed to overcome the problem of electricity, and the deprived flood-affected people could not get relief. The ignorance of the slogan of “Roti, kapra and makan, weak federation, terrorism, sectarianism, financial crises given set back to the party. Moreover, loyal members of PPP from different districts of Punjab validated the Party membership (Haider and Ali,2018).

Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz and Women Empowerment:

Pakistan Muslim League in the 1990 Elections won and formed a government with the coalition of Islamic Jamhoori Ittehad(IJI). Nawaz Sharif, as Prime Minister, gained 105 seats in the National Assembly out of 217. In Punjab Party succeeded with an absolute majority. The women in the National Assembly had a nominal presence, with only two seats, and elected women were Benazir Bhutto and Nusrat Bhutto. On the same pattern in the Punjab Assembly, ‘Fauzia Bahram’ and ‘Begum Raj Gill’ were elected on a general seat and respectively the other one on the minority quota. In 1990, election no reserved quota was fixed, that’s why no one woman was elected to reserved seats in both the National and Provincial Assemblies. In his governance, Nawaz Sharif had to face the implications from orthodox parties. As he remained within the important ministeries of Zia ul Haq, it was considered that he must be a follower of Zia, so the possibility of amending the women relatehis billd legislation would not happen (Awan 2018, 375).

Islami Jahoori Ittehad declared in their 1988 manifesto to safeguard the Islamic rights of women under Chapter VIII with the title of ‘Women’. It provided inheritance rights, education and better opportunities for employment, but manifestos were silent on the repeal of ‘Hudood Laws’. The perception about the

orthodox attitude fixed in the 1992 Senate Meeting on 'Women's Day', Senator Dr Muhammad Rehan remarked on biased laws against women, who "drew on often repeated arguments to claim that the existing laws did not discriminate against the women folk" (Yasin, 1992).

The suspicion about poor socio-economic conditions in Nawaz government was confirmed with he issued of "Enforcement of the Shariah bill." This bill aimed to establish religious laws first of importance than the normal law (Khan 1992,199). Some Politicians observed that Nawaz Sharif took such initiatives to get the favour of the IJI and settle his govt. weak position but stood vainly. This bill has undergone criticism not only from PDA but also from women organizations and is considered as to promote 'dispute and division'. PDA affirmed in its resolution, "the 1973 constitution ...guarantees that no laws repugnant to the Quran and Sunnah can be enacted, has once and for all settled the question of enforcement of Shariah in the country. As such, the present scheme amounts to undermining the revolutionary spirit of our golden" (Dawn, May 04, 1991).

A legal scholar reinforced with the same sense when the bill is under examined states: "the Shariat bill in its present form, however, cannot be taken to better Islamise the systems and institutions than they are now as it brings no novel ideas or proposals....contents of the proposed Bill are rhetorical, redundant, repetitive and declaratory in nature."(Naseem,1991). Nonetheless, this bill was not proposed against women, due to the nature of laws enacted during Zia regime, it was suspected that Pakistan (Ahmad,1991). Finally, the bill was approved with a margin of votes. The purpose of adopting this bill was only to strong and drag out the length of Nawaz's tenure, but his government was banished by the President with the allegation of corruption exploitation of power. So the implications of this bill were not evaluated fully (Pakistan Observer, 23rd &26th April 1993). Often, he proclaimed that in Pakistan, women would be bestowed with the rights according to the Quran and Hadith. He himself realized that the true share of women was not provided in his ruling period, as he said: "My government remains conscious of the fact that women's potential for self-enhancement has not been fully exploited. Many of them continue to suffer from illiteracy, malnutrition, unemployment and inadequate housing" (The Muslim, March 09, 1992).

Nawaz assumed the power for the 2nd time in 1997, at that time his Party "took nearly two-thirds of the seats in the National Assembly, three-fourths of the seats in the Punjab Assembly". Women representation in the National Assembly was only six women elected on general seats. The religious parties like Jamiat- ul-Ulema- e Islam (JUI) received only 2 seats, and Jamat- e- Islami abstained from the election process. Maulana Hussain Ahmad and Maulana Fazl- ur Rehman (JUI) stated that "they would launch mass movements to overthrow the present parliamentary system and replace it with a true Islamic government" (Syed 1998,117-118). These pervasive threats and fears overpowered him to pressured him. It became more aggravated when tensity erupted with the military and the Judiciary (Rizvi 1999, 181). Owing to ongoing tensions, the social issues likewise, gender

equality was not taken into consideration in his period, and it” appears to have blocked all opportunities for the advancement of women’s rights (Mittra & Bachchan 2004,87).

Nawaz’s government passed the 15th amendment that constituted the supreme power to the Prime Minister and presented the Sharia Bill. Although this bill is quiet on female entity but it was estimated that Zia’s bigoted style of Islamisation epoch would affect women’s rights. It could get only 2/3rd majority in the National Assembly to get adopted in the Senate. PML(N)'s position was weak; it could not be ratified due to a lack of votes. During his tenure, no legislative efforts were made to safeguard the interests of women only certain statements were given, for instance, in the parliament session of October 09, 1998, recorded as, “women’s rights were also fully protected and he (Nawaz Sharif) wanted to see the society where women were free to move without any fear”(Dawn, October 10, 1998).

For the third time, elected as Prime Minister in the 2013 elections, Nawaz Sharif’s Party kept 187 seats in the National Assembly. The religious parties, such as Jammata-e-Islami and Jamiat Ulema e Islam (F) representation in the National Assembly was low with only 4 and 13 seats they could secure in the National Assembly. The women contested the election with full strength. There were “total of 228 women in the National and Provincial Assemblies, whereas 17 are in the National Assembly, 141 in all four of the Provincial Assemblies, whereas 17 are in the Senate. Their overall proportion of representation is 19.5% i.e., 228 out of 1170 members”(Awan, 2018). The Party Electoral Manifestos committed to the safeguard of women rights in the 2013 Elections, as mentioned by Nayab Javed and Ra’ana Malik in their Gendered Analysis on pages 204-209.

<p>Gender equality in all democratic spheres: “Inclusion of Women in all Judiciary levels of governments, Gender sensitization added in the legal education system & judicial academies. Establish a women's commission to ensure women participation at all levels”.</p> <p>“Inclusion of Women in Influencing Political Party policies and process”.</p> <p>EVAW “To protect their inheritance rights and improve pro-women legislation. Devise new anti-discrimination and EVAW laws, along with proposing the formation of sexual harassment committees at the workplace.</p> <p>Economic Concern:</p>	<p>Gender Equality in Social Sphere: “Land Rights Technical vocational Education for women. Maternal & Child Health Care. Speedy Justice Action plan in Property and family Disputes. Women protection centers.”</p> <p>Customary Violence: Un-Islamic Customary Practices (Karo Kari, Wani, Sawara) against women criminalized through Law prevent forced childhood marriage.”</p> <p>Health Concerns: To implement training and healthcare programmes to bridge existing gender gaps to launch population welfare programmes.”</p> <p>Education Concerns:</p>
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<p>To design microcredit programmes for women’s empowerment to provide house building loans for widows.</p> <p>To introduce daycare facilities for working women.</p> <p>To initiate a women Entrepreneurship Financing Scheme to promote women’s business activities.</p>	<p>To preferentially appoint women teachers at the primary school level to pay special attention to professional and higher Education of women to devise programmes to increase women’s literacy rate.”</p>
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While fostering the manifestos of the 2013 Elections, Mian Nawaz Sharif stated: “We consider these elections are not just about change but about the future of Pakistan” (Tribune, 2013).

The enthusiastic Participation of Women in the 2013 general elections and their participation in the majority of urban areas in the 2015 local bodies elections showed their courage. During PMLN’s five-year tenure, several pieces of legislation were passed in favour of women’s rights. Farhat Ullah Babar, PPP Senator, asked for the consideration of Laws relating to violence and crime and in response, “Anti-Honor Killings Laws (Criminal Laws Amendment Bill” and “Anti- Rape Laws (Criminal Laws Amendment) Bill”. The first change in legislation was to revoke the agreement that was signed to resolve the matter in the form of a money settlement in honor killing cases. It is worth mentioning that such amendments came into being after the murder case of Qandeel Baloch, which accentuated to a step forward against the social evil of female killing in the name of honour killing. The gender issue of Forgiveness”. This documentary on the topic of weak legislation for the enforcement of punishment won the Nobel Prize. In addition, it was recommended to charge severe punishments and cases should be finalized within six months. Maulana Muhammad Khan Sheran, who was Chairman of Islamic Ideology (CII), opposed the necessity of a DNA test in rape cases as proof of validity. He was also not in favour of extension the marriage age from 16 to 18 years. His views were condemned by the lawmakers and social media, with some stating that ICI is confined only to work for advisory work. But these incidents could not create a hindrance in providing liberties to females. Certain amendments were made during 2017 to 2018, such as “The National Commission on the Status of Women (Amendment) Act 2017”, “The Women in Distress and Detention Fund (Amendment) Act, 2017”. These legal amendments dispensed with economic and legal support to indigent females in society. In 2018, another amendment was the “Criminal Law (Amendment) Bill, 2018, was appeared after the sexual abuse and death of six years six-year-old Zainab. After that discourse of ineffectual works of the National Commission was opened with the view that nothing effective could be seen regarding Children’s rights (Awan, 2018, 379).

PMLN on the official website declared to provide, since 2013-2018, “Safeguarded Fundamental Rights” to women, stating that:

“Passed the Punjab Protection of Women Against Violence Act 2016 and

'Protection against Harassment of Women in Workplace' (Amendment) Act, 2014 to guarantee the physical security of women. Enacted the 'Punjab Sound System Regulation Act', 2015 and "Punjab Vigilance Committee Act, 2016". Implemented a gender-sensitive curriculum to create awareness regarding gendered issues amongst the youth of Pakistan. Created Violence Against Women Centers (VAWCs) to rehabilitate survivors of violence under a one-window operation. Initiated the Women-on-Wheels program to increase women's mobility and access to public spaces. Introduced maternity leaves, day care centers and entrepreneurship financing schemes to create ease of access for women into the workforce. Passed the Punjab Fair Representation of Women Act by ensuring 33% representation of women in all public organizations and committees".

Dr. Waqas M. Admitted, "From 2013 until 2018, the PML-N administration, under the leadership of Nawaz Sharif, implemented a number of policies aimed at enhancing women's access to economic, health care and educational opportunities" (Waqas, Saira & Khushnood, 2024).

A remarkable change can be seen in 2008 with a new party, Pakistan Takrik-e-Insaf (PTI) emerged with nation-wide support within the existence of two conventional Parties, PPP and PML(N). Both these parties are directed by the Bhutto and Sharif families, categorically the majority in Punjab and Sindh (Wu & Ali, 2020). The ideology of these two PPP and PMLN is based on a traditional clique system, only the right of the privileged class to rule rather than ideology based system (Khan, 2018). Besides this, PTI, with no privileged patronage background, rather than based on the ideology of "Change in existing status quo politics," is committed to safeguarding female and children's interests (Wu & Ali, 2020). As Nayab Javed cited: "The PMLN and PPP are 'clientelistic parties', more concerned with the networking of social relationships, have more power and use resources for the benefit of their candidates". In addition, PTI succeeded in the 2018 elections under the leadership of Imran Khan with the ideology of 'Islamic Welfare State' on the pattern of Madina city. (Nayab, 2024). Before this, PTI emerged as 2nd largest party in the 2013 elections due to the bad governance of PPP (Haider, y). In the course of their governance, owing to their performance, it was considered an amateur party with novice politicians as compare to PPP and PMLN. Slow functions and policy cessation, such as energy issues and Imran Khan's undergone alterations in Cabinet ministries, showed that PTI failed to implement their manifestos (Mujeeba & Muzamal, 2024).

The 2018 elections did not have a significant impact on democracy and lost credence. The opposition parties labelled the 2018 elections as rigged. Khalil Ghani stated that: "The opposition Parties came on the road to demonstrate their demands. The running of government machinery for the inexperienced Khan was difficult, although the establishment was on his side. But the coronavirus, high inflation, the Kashmir Issue, and the unity of opposition parties in the shape of PDM changed the political scenario very soon, which finally culminated in the removal of the PTI government in April 2022. The year 2022 proved to be the year of political and constitutional crisis in Pakistan" (Ghani & Amin, 2024).

PMLN won the 2022 elections and succeeded in forming a government under the Premiership of Shahbaz Sharif, and Maryam Nawaz became the first female Chief Minister of Punjab in Pakistan's history. During the PMLN's timeline from 2022-2023, the government presented the 'National Policy' to eradicate violence against women. Created 'women Journalist complaint cell'. For women's empowerment fixed PKR 5 billion to launch programmes such as "women on wheels". Furthermore, Pakistan Muslim League N, in order to empower women in education and the political sphere, made commitments and gave a vision policy from 2024-2029 on the party's official website, indicating that, for ensuring economic assistance, PMLN authorities provide special loans to girls for higher studies. Enlisting new female teachers, especially from rural areas. Bring back into action 'Girl Guide Association rural' both in cities and rural areas. Foster to use the already available Public schools for part-time to provide expertise to women in some skills, particularly housewives. In addition, it's also mentioned in the government's promises 2024- 2029 to encourage women in the political sphere by adding their seats in the 'Political parties Central committees 'decision-making infrastructure. Increase their representation in general elections and the public and private sectors. It is also to make certain their representation in National and Provincial assemblies is at least 30% (Accessed from PMLN Party official website). On 8th March, on International "Women's Day", the first CM of Punjab Maryam Nawaz, issued a message with the title of "Dhee Rani- the Wisest" on Directorate General Public Relations official website, stated that "women and children are my redline" and active police station has been established in Punjab and more will be seen in near future. For women's safety, she ensured certain initiatives, for example, the 'women's helpline and Panic Button Project '. She points out that "An e-bike has been launched for the convenience of women. More bikes will be given". Maryam Nawaz calculated all the programmes initiated for the women's protection like wise, 60% scholarship and hostel facilities are provided to female students, also equipped with modern technology Laptops. For working women, she said that '307 day care centers' benefit more than 9541 families. To upgrade the lives of rural women, CM Punjab provided financial assistance in the form of "Livestock Programme in South Punjab". To economically strong women, she added that the 'Easy Business Card Programme' loan on easy installment for the 'Apni Chat Ana Ghar Scheme contributed a lot to the protection and progress of women (Directorate General Public Relations, March 8, 2025). Maryam Nawaz's commitment to women's security transforms the country into development and progress. As Syeda Alizeh Ahmad writes in the newspaper: "The announcement of plans to establish a Women Protection Force under the leadership is both timely and transformative. The initiative not only underscores a firm resolve to combat gender based violence but also signifies a broader commitment to creating a society where women can thrive without fear and constraint. By prioritising women's safety through dedicated protection centers in key districts, the government is sending a clear message that violence against women.

Comparative Analysis

The constitution of 1973 granted wide-ranging clauses in favour of women's rights. The Pakistan Peoples Party leadership initiated different programmes to uplift the status of women. The year There Rights Committee (WRC) was conducted in order to check and formulate laws for women's status. The feminist activists provoked and criticised the laws introduced by Zia's regime because these legislations were hurdles on the way of gender equality (Ahmad,1996). After the 1988 elections, Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto failed to amend Zia's legislation that affected women's rights. Her era was considered liberal electronic media, with no significant steps taken during this period to improve the status of women, even though it was a period of a woman Prime Minister (Rashid,2006). Lawrence Ziring admits that her government "was too weak politically to seek the repeal of the fundamentalist-inspired laws considered degrading to women. She could not attack the causes for a slumping economy, and she was unable to address the problem of Pakistan's poor" (Ziring 1991,182).

Once again in 1993, elections PPP once again declared successful and Benazir Bhutto for the second time as Prime Minister. Unfortunately, once again, Benazir could not deliver any reforms, particularly for the progress of women. Women's activists also did not believe that to get a better position during her rule. (Lawrence,1994). The establishment of female police stations and appointing females to high-ranking positions could not satisfy women's rights organizations. Asma Jahangir, due to the pretext not ready to accept the seat of the first female Judge (Badry,2020). In 1996, a remarkable step by her government was taken in terms of the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (EDAW) (Shaheed, 2016).

It was also witnessed the killing of females in the name of honour during her time period, which was highlighted worldwide. The local and international Human rights organisations demanded legal against against them. So it was instructed to start a media campaign to awake awareness. As the Prime Minister herself admitted that females suffered with physical, financial and patriarchy issues. There is a need to use more resources for the betterment of women's organizations (Bhutto,1996). In 1996, the President, Frooq Leghari, dissolved her government with the charge of bad performance and domestic unrest (LaPorte 1997,118).

Nawaz Sharif assumed power after the 1990 elections and became Prime Minister, but could not proceed to restore female representation in Parliament owing to the challenges faced by the opposition (Moghadam,1992). In his second time regime, the ratio of honour killings increased, particularly in Sindh. PPP proposed a resolution in August 1999 to have a debate on this sensitive issue. The Senators refused to become part of the voting procedure. Most of them were in favor of the motion presented by Ajmal Khattak, Javed Iqbal and Chaudary Anwar; they had dignity concerns about the caste vote on this resolution, and there was no matter for discussion on it (Cowasjee,1999). A serious distress and unrest arose

between the women's rights wing and government authorities. Hina Jilani advocator of women's rights, and Asma Jahangir were called "misguiding" the female society. Mushahid Hussain showed his concerns as Minister of Information not to disclose the rape issues in the media, as television is a domestic medium. (Dawn, February 1, 1999). The PMLN authorities also added confrontation in Punjab when one of his minister stated that "all NGOs working in the province will have to have a clear clearance certificate from the provincial government and federal intelligence agencies before registration... and give a written statement that they are not involved in anti- state, anti government and anti- religion activities".The government machinery opposed the foreign funds received the NGOs and condemned ASR, a women's organization for "brainwashing young women and making them pursue a course that clashed with government policies"(Dawn, December 30, 1998). The CM of Punjab and Minister of Punjab Welfare Binyamin Rizvi made it clear to various organisations, especially non-government level, to avoid giving statements on political matters from their platforms. These authorities also showed their concerns towards the activities of 'Ajoka and Shirkat Gah', and also for the 'Human Rights Commission of Pakistan' (HRCP). According to them, "These are spreading vulgarity, immorality and obscenity in the name of human rights" (The News, May 15,16, and 27,1999). It is a ready that Nawaz Sharif was not in an absolute majority, but he made a little effort to uplift the status of women. The National Action Plan did not fully impact the lives of women, except in the 1990s, it added women's shelters. The selling of the 'First Women's Bank and the merger of the women's ministry into the Special Education and Welfare Ministry raised protests in the country (Shaheed,2009).

From 1988 to 1997, women with minimal seats in the National Assembly were elected. Their percentage collapsed after the 1988 elections for reserved seats. It can be seen that their presence on reserved seats in the next 3 years was no more (Muhammad, Abbas & Waris,2022).

Females had nominal representation in the cabinet only 24 seats in the National Assembly. From 1988 to 1990, in reserved seats, 20% females were elected. From 1990-1997, they did not have a strong position in the legislature. Only in the first Premiership of Benazir Bhutto, females have 10% representation in the cabinet. For instance, women had no share in the federal cabinet of 1990-1993, the same as the following cabinet, 1993 to 1996. Nawaz Sharif, in his second term of government, selected only one female minister. Although it was a reality that females had a nominal share in parliament from 1990-1997. It was the need of the hour to "incorporate women's issues into policymaking. This study supports the argument that women were not given equal access to decision-making institutions." Women's rights organizations have trust in female Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto to address and ratify the legislation passed in Zia's regime. Despite of their hopes, PPP could not 'reinstate women's reserve seats. Her stance was that with a low majority in the parliament, she was unable to repeal the laws passed by the military dictator (Sher, Feroze & Mubashar,2022).

The severe tension arose between women activists and the state as Saigal mentioned: “vacillated between co-operation and collaboration with Benazir Bhutto (1988-90,1993-1996), and confrontation and contestation during the time of Nawaz Sharif (1993,1997-99)” (Saigal,2016).

It is quite clear to understand that from 1988 to 1999, women-related issues had no priority for legislation. From 1988 to 2018, the Pakistan Muslim League and PPP established the rule for thrice, with no special attention was given to gender issues. The expectations from the first female Prime Minister were also ended when she failed to amend the ‘notorious anti-women laws’ of the military dictatorship. Comparatively, during Nawaz Sharif’s three Premiership tenures from 1988-2018, there were no concrete steps and an inactive legislative attitude related to women’s issues. It was thought that Nawaz Sharif was the second man or ‘Product’ of Zia as he remained with him on the Ministry of Finance and as Chief Minister during his Martial Law period (Awan 2018, p.366).

The Zardari government issued the Waseela-e-Haq programme and the Benazir Income Support Programme to address the financial crisis of poor people had a positive impact contrary to mass expectations (Haider and Ali, p.150).

The important legislation passed by the PPP government from 2008-2013 faced criticism from opposition parties likewise, on the bill “Protection against Harassment at workplace Act, 2010 JUI’s senators opposed the bill, considering Islamic customs and asked to amend the law with ‘Islamic dress code’ that’s the main cause of harassment. Pakistan Peoples Party’s own members from rural areas of Sindh criticised the law” Prevention of Anti-women Practices,2011” because these anti-women activities were on a large scale in their localities, and it created hurdles in getting votes from them. Moreover, PPP faced pressure from ‘JUI-F, PMLN and Council of Islamic Ideology (CCI)’ as they regarded this legislation “will increase divorce rate”. “The prescribed punishments in ill are already enacted by other laws”. “Bill is anti-Islamic”. Which will promote Western culture values in the country” (Awan 2018).

PML(N) came back into power after fourteen years and worked well in accordance with their 2013 manifesto, where seventeen million scholarships were awarded to needy students. Teachers were recruited through the Punjab Public Commission on merit. The percentage of female students was increased to 48% (Zaman & Mansoor, 2024).

Overall, there are so many areas related to the Social rights of women to be addressed. All the political parties mostly concentrated on the maternal well-being of mother and Child, and decreased the population size. There is still an indispensable need to pay heed to their intentions to turn down the death ratio of children, procreative health and eliminate discrimination in elementary education. The parties should focus on forming female-skilled training and tackle the women’s ailment condition, also aged person’s health. In 2017 PML-N government initiated the ‘Minister’s National Health Programme’ for impoverished people, but no strategy was adopted to implement the commitments made in the manifesto (Javed& Ra’ana,

2025). Investing in female financial growth is the approach to their economic empowerment. The PCSW 2017 report indicates “ the female labor force participation rate is highest (28.8%) in the rural agriculture sector, but is still lower than that of males(69%)” (Home-based Workers, HBWs).

Labour force survey of 2014-15 reviewed, “women’s participation in labour markets of rural areas is higher (28.8%) as compared to their participation in labour markets of urban areas (10%). So the political parties could not justify their promises in policy legislation. PML-N attempted to pass labour rights, but that rights were not literally related to female labor rights (National Assembly of Pakistan,2015). According to Sustainable Development Goals Target 5 (SDG): “Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources. In accordance with national laws”. In order to achieve the target 5A, electoral parties in Pakistan need to make gender aware policies in the economic sector. Moreover, under Vision 2025, the government has also committed to increasing the female labor force participation rate to 45% (Javed& Malik, 2025). The lack of female participation in politics and legislative measures, in spite of all the promises made by the governments, “many reasons are impeding women's substantive representation in patriarchal political culture: financial dependence on male counterparts, restricted mobility, weak decision-making power, family barriers and cultural norms and practices” (Bari, 2005).

The leading Political Parties, such as PPP, PML-N, all committed promises for quota allotment for females in their electoral manifestos, but a contradicted attitude could be seen aftermath.PPP committed to “Inclusion of women in all standing committees (2013) and 5% quota for women on general seats (2018)” Moreover, the PML-N manifesto also did not effectuate, for example, “Inclusion of women in influencing political party policies and process (2013); in 2018, PML-N remained silent about women's participation in the process of enacting a law. In addition, Nayab Javed stated:” In 2018, as per the direction of ECP, all the major parties allocated the 5% seats for the women legislators so that they can contest on general seats on an equal basis to men. But the manifestos remain silent in order to develop the accountability mechanisms for the allocation of women's tickets”(Javed & Malik, p.211).

CONCLUSION

Political Parties' Manifestos played a great role in mould the Public opinion in favour of or against any political Party. In Pakistan, it has been seen that the commitments made by the Political Parties are not actually implemented in the true spirit. The same case is with the leading two traditional Parties of Pakistan Pakistan Peoples Party and the Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz. It is also apparent that PPP under the Premiership of Benazir Bhutto, as the first female PM, and PML-N under Nawaz Sharif argued to initiate programmes for women’s empowerment, but they were not in an absolute majority in the centre to promulgate amendments regarding

the Women's anti-discriminations act.

After the 1988 elections, except Benazir and her mother, only one seat was given to a female in the National Assembly. However, during her tenure, regardless of internal and external tensions, in the Health Care and Family Planning sector 58% were surged in this programme. In 2007, Benazir Bhutto was assassinated, and PPP won the 2008 elections as the masses of Pakistan paid tribute to martyrdom and casted votes in her favour. Although PPP under the Leadership of Asif Ali Zardari passed several legislations for the safeguard and rights of Women, such as protection against harassment, domestic violence, steps against biased social activities and most important, was Benazir Income Support Programme. But PPP after Benazir's demise due to Zardari's corruption and effective measures to cope with the crises lost its popularity among the masses. During the Nawaz Sharif government in 1990, no women were elected on reserved seats in both houses, and he also could not deliver in the form of an anti-discrimination act owing to orthodox parties. In his second Premiership, only six women were elected to general seats. When PML-N in the 2008 election succeeded with a majority in the federal with 187 seats in the National Assembly, the party initiated programmes with elected 228 seats in the National and Provincial Assembly. Certain amendments and laws were enacted from 2013-2018 under the PML-N rule, and it was thought that, after growing criminal acts and honor killing under the pressure of civil society, PML-N took reactionary measures. It was also assessed that the National Commission failed to work for the rights of children. In 2018, for the 4th time, PML-N won the election mandate with an immense majority. Shahbaz Sharif as PM and Maryam Nawaz become the first Chief Minister of Punjab. Under the PML-N rule, several laws and schemes are promulgated for empowering women. Comparatively, these initiatives and legislations are more than those of the PPP governments in the past and also their own previous regimes. Though pro-women policies were adopted on an enlarge scale by both PPP and PML-N in their 3rd time ruling period.

The comparative study of women's empowerment initiatives in both governments of PML-N and PPP concludes considerable efforts have been undertaken for gender equality, education, health and economic empowerment. Similar, on the other hand, almost all Parties in Pakistan, including PPP and PML-N, didn't fully ensure women's holistic approach in the Party's law-making positions and governing boards. It also needs the inclusion of such strategies to overcome the gender discrimination at the Party level.

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