

The Local Government System of Pakistan: Participation, Representation and Empowerment of Women

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Abstract

Politics is the field where women have been ignored since ancient times, due to the political notions determined by ideological beliefs and cultural norms. Among the United Nations' measures remove gender inequalities, includes recommendation for reserving 30 per cent seats for women in legislatures. In Pakistan, this remarkable change was effected in 2000, as it reserved 33 percent seats for women at the local government and 17 per cent at the Provincial/National Assemblies and the Senate level, so about 40,000 women entered in local bodies throughout the country in 2000-01, and almost 55,000 women contested local government in 2005. Despite these developments, women are still facing challenges that deter the full realization of their roles as active interlocutors of policy-making. Keeping in view these aspects, this paper has analyzed the local government, focusing on women, exploring whether the increasing number of women in legislatures is merely a numerical strength, or is empowering them, too, Whether they are the 'subjects of change' or the 'agents of change.' It is calculated that administrative structures of local government is male-dominated, whereas women are trying to ensure their position, however, gendered barriers remain unbroken.

Introduction

Throughout the world, it is observed that power relations, which shape political, economic, social and cultural environment, inhibit women's full participation in these areas. Politics is one of those fields where gender inequality has gained global attention. Women's representation and participation have been restricted at both local and global levels. From voters to elected members, they are under-represented and this occurred not due to lack of abilities, but the prevailing environment of political discrimination and cultural barriers denied them right of equal participation even in democratic governments. Taking notice of this disparity, the UN Fourth World Conference on Women (September 1995) introduced the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action—the

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two important documents for empowerment and gender balance.¹ These declarations recognized the fact that women's inclusion is crucial in the decision-making process as it would not only enhance their confidence, but also reduce gender inequalities prevailing in several other areas. It is an established fact that without gender equality and equity of opportunities, political institutions cannot be strengthened for democracy and good governance.

Literature review

A bulk of literature is available on gender inequality and low representation of women in the decision-making process. Khosla et al. (2008) pointed out gender equality as an instrument for women's empowerment and emancipating women of subordinate positions. However, the local governments (LGs) have inherently patriarchal setting. Their structure and role is less likely to accommodate women with their dual duties; domestic and professional roles. Stein (1997) has highlighted the particular needs and concerns in male-dominated societies to address gender disparity adequately. Kabeer (2011) has defined equality and equity between men and women under the law, regarding opportunities. Gender equality cannot be constructed through formal laws in traditional societies as the prevailing unwritten norms never shared such understanding due to patriarchal practices. Mumtaz (2005) observed that gender equality was difficult to achieve in the political structure of Pakistan without introducing and adopting quota policies. Furthermore, she is hopeful about women's inclusion in politics with some constructive alterations. Bari (2001) and Zia (2009) have observed that reserved seats (gender quota) in Pakistan have become a guarantee for women's inclusion in legislatures, providing representation at upper levels in general and local level in particular; otherwise women's view was not being incorporated into politics. Khattak (2010) has discussed the Devolution Plan and its impact on women in local bodies. She has briefly discussed the history of women's representation in politics of Pakistan, focusing on local government. Yazdani (2004) has provided the details of seats won by women in the local government system of Pakistan. She also highlighted the areas where women have to face problems as voters and candidates. Subramanian (2002) and Tripathi (2011) have thrown light on empirical evidence from India, where women are successful, having half of the seats in local

¹ United Nations, Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing Platform for Action and Declaration, 1995. Available at: <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/>

government (but constitution provides 33 percent). They secure it through their working on local projects. Saigol (2011) has provided details about women empowerment in local government of Pakistan. Bates (2014) emphasised that the electoral system plays a significant role and reserved seats have increased the number of women in local government.

The scholars have talked about hidden constraints in Pakistan that avert women's selection as candidates and share in decision-making institutions due to the patriarchal structure. A report of SPDC (2007) has concluded that reserved seats have brought a greater number of women in politics. Reyes (2002) is of the opinion that quotas for women in Pakistan have brought empowerment to women. Rai (2005) has linked quota policies with the image of the army general (Musharraf) who wanted to demonstrate his 'enlightened moderation'. She also criticized the role of nazims, who, unfortunately, keep development funds and projects away from women and rarely share them. Other scholars noticed that gender quota and decentralization have increased the prospects of mass representation, including the marginalized groups like women, bringing a huge number in politics. Though hidden constraints are there yet women are trying to make their way.

Research hypothesis

Reviewing the existing literature and empirical evidences, the study has hypothesized that women have strengthened themselves through number, but not yet overcome the barriers, which are still impeding their path in local bodies.

To explore the causes of this disparity, the paper is aimed to examine increased share of women in local government, identifying opportunities for the participation and ascertaining the challenges confronting their representation.

Methodology

For this purpose, the paper has adopted descriptive and analytical approaches. It also partially used the framework of Women's Empowerment, first introduced by Sara Hlupekile Longwe. This framework is about women's participation and mobilization, empowering them by removing and addressing different forms of gender discrimination and barriers, which often oppress women and marginalized groups. This framework is based on the concept of five different levels of equality:

- (1) Control (it included resources of production and distribution).
- (2) Decision-making (participation in policy making, share in projects and funding).
- (3) Conscientisation (realization of discriminatory practices and inferior status in comparison to men).
- (4) Access (access to resources, education, employment, labour and services).
- (5) Welfare (better living standard meaning availability of food, shelter and clothing).²

The paper has indirectly looked at these five levels of equality to determine the level of women's empowerment in LG system, reviewing opportunities vis-à-vis barriers and overall impact of increased seats. For this purpose, the qualitative research method is employed, i.e., consulting data from published material. However, informal interviews with lady councilors, politician and members of provincial/national assemblies are also sought to get first hand knowledge of the issues.

The paper is divided into eight sections. The first section is an Introduction, which briefly provides literature review, objectives and research methodology. The second section provides the definitions of gender and empowerment whereas the third is about women and politics. The fourth section provides a brief history of local government in Pakistan, discussing the efforts of military regimes to transfer the authority at grassroots levels. Fifth is devolution of power plan and women empowerment through increased number of seats. Sixth is about the elections of local government after allocation of one-third share in seats. Seventh is about opportunities and barriers, regarding representation and participation of women in local government system. The last part provides findings and policy recommendations.

Gender and empowerment

The terms sex and gender are being used alternatively, but there is a clear distinction between the two concepts. Joseph wrote:

Gender refers to the different roles and responsibilities that society assigns to people on the basis of whether they are male or female. Boys and girls are socialised into certain behaviours..., boys are supposed to behave in one way and girls in another. Although gender refers to both men and women, it is almost always interpreted as a woman's issue

² Tina Wallace & Candida March, *Changing Perceptions: Writings on Gender and Development* (Oxfam (UK and Ireland): Oxford University Press, 1991).

because it involves the changing of women's subordinate position in society.³

Defining sex, Joseph further added: 'Sex refers to the physical and biological differences between man and woman while gender refers to the different roles and responsibilities that society assigns to people on the basis of whether they are male or female.'⁴ According to another definition, sex is referred with biological features, whereas the gender is identified through social roles. It is also determined in the perspectives of history and culture.⁵ These explanations link sex to physical and biological differences between male and female, taking gender as a relational term characterizing respective roles of man and woman. Gender is instrumental to distinguish the two for understanding of the social processes.⁶

Gender equality means equal opportunities for all human beings without difference of male or female. A study noted, 'Gender equality means that women and men have ... to engage in and contribute to political, economic, social and cultural development, and to benefit from the outcomes. In this sense, gender equality meant that society places the same values on women and men for performing different functions'.⁷

Empowerment is: 'A social action process that promotes participation of people, organizations and communities in gaining control over their lives in their community and larger society... Empowerment is not characterized as achieving power to dominate others, but rather power to act with others to effect change.'⁸ It is the transformation of the structure of subservience, amending laws of property-sharing, control of female's labour by male relatives and those institutions, which perpetuate and reinforce male authority.⁹ A more nuanced outcome of

³ Carmel Joseph, Gender and Local Government. Johannesburg (South Africa): Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. August 2002. <http://www.afrimap.org/english/images/documents/file42d524cd27663.pdf>.carm

⁴ Ibid., 7.

⁵ Wallace & March, *Changing Perception*, 3.

⁶ Status of Women Canada, (1996). <http://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/64123/publication.html>

⁷ Prabha Khosla, Bernhard Barth, & UN-HABITAT, *Gender in Local Government: A Sourcebook for Trainers*, 9 May 2008, 18. [www.un.org/womenwatch/directory/pdf/Source BK 9-May.pdf](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/directory/pdf/Source_BK_9-May.pdf)

⁸ Jane Stein, *Empowerment and Women's Health: Theory, Methods and Practice* (London: Zed Books, 1997), 380.

⁹ Batliwala and Srilata, *Defining Women's Empowerment: A Conceptual Framework*, 1993, 5. www.genderatwork.org/updir/Batliwala-empowermentframework.htm

empowerment is manifested in the redistribution of power between men/women, individuals, groups, castes, classes, races or nations.

Empowerment is often taken as a strong instrument to achieve sustainable development and better living standard.¹⁰ It is associated with the process and outcome, attempting to achieve a relative degree of ability to make an influence on the society.¹¹ It is an extension of authority, enabling the people to make choices in those areas where their talent was previously denied.¹²

Women's empowerment and politics

Women's empowerment is a 'process of renegotiating accepted norms and expectations about female and male roles, relations, and responsibilities, opening up new opportunities for women within the household, the community, state agencies and civil society.'¹³ It is defined in various ways, e.g.: access to material resources; share in jobs and business openings; friendly working environment; representation in political and decision-making bodies; basic rights granted in the constitution in true spirit; and other privileges endorsed by international treaties, accords and conventions. It also demands women's liberal and informed choices at domestic and social levels as the power is constructed by the social systems, which distributes it unequally. Empowerment enables a woman to understand the existing conditions, choosing and deciding priorities with tracing solutions to her problems and getting ability to take action for raising her status. Regardless of all this, women would not be empowered unless they would include in the decision-making and policy-making process at all levels of the state and

¹⁰ Tulika Tripathi, 'Women's Empowerment: Concept and Empirical Evidence from India'. Paper presented at the annual conference of the Centre for Development Economics, Delhi School of Economics (December 10-13, 2011).

¹¹ Lee. H. Staples, 'Powerful Ideas about Empowerment', *Administration in Social Work*, 14:2, 1990. DOI: [10.1300/J147v14n02_03](https://doi.org/10.1300/J147v14n02_03)

¹² Naila Kabeer, 'Reflections on the measurement of women's empowerment', in Anne Sisask (ed.), *Discussing Women's Empowerment: Theory and Practice*, SIDA studies (3) (Stockholm: Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, 2001).

¹³ Rubina Saigol, *Women Empowerment in Pakistan: A Scoping Study*, Aurat Foundation, January, 2011. www.af.org.pk/gep/deskStudies/Women_s%20Empowerment.pdf

society, otherwise, marginal position is to remain in political, social and economic areas.¹⁴

In the conservative societies, social resources, means of production, land and labour are recognized as symbols of authority and these are generally taken as legitimate assets of males. This concept turns the gender relation into a scenario of authority and dependence. Such artificial, false and imposed relationships make the weaker gender sufferer, throwing it into deprivation, oppression, and exploitation. These disparities are often attributed to women's marginalized position from family to society. Good governance cannot work at any level if gender balance is not maintained. Women constitute more than half of the world's population and their inclusion in the decision-making process cannot be sidelined as it is crucial for sustainable development.

Since the olden times, the patriarchal ideologies have kept women away from politics, allowing the male-domination. Women's primary roles as mothers and mates in the reproductive sphere of society were taken as a priority. This led both family and society to invest fewer resources for development of women, increasing their dependence on men socially and economically. Realizing this injustice, gender activists and women's organizations challenged this discrimination and masculine culture of institutions within the human rights framework. They demanded equal share, arguing that women's participation and representation were the basic needs of a democratic system. In line with global trend, the United Nations took different initiatives to improve the status of women through various resolutions and conventions. The UN passed its first resolution on Women's Political Rights in 1946. It was an attempt to maintain equality without gender discrimination. Next was the First World Conference of the United Nations, held in Mexico City in 1975. This conference acknowledged the gender inequality as a hurdle for overall development of women.¹⁵ The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) of 1979 also ensured the equal participation of both sexes in politics. This convention received a universal endorsement and 185 countries adopted it, taking it a key document for practicing gender equality in all

¹⁴ Saidul Huq and M. Shohid, 'Women's Participation in Local Government: A Tool for Sustainable Development of Bangladesh', *European Journal of Business and Social Sciences*, 4:11 (February, 2016). <http://www.ejbss.com/recent.aspx-/>

¹⁵ Mussarat Jabeen & Sher Muhammad, 'Electoral Gender Quotas in Pakistan: Including the Excluded, Empowering the Powerless', *NICE Research Journal*, vol. 6, 2013.

areas. In Pakistan, due to Zia's policies, gender rights were not on the priority list, so CEDAW was ratified in 1995 at the time of the Beijing Conference.¹⁶ Its ratification compels a government to ensure adequate representation of women in all levels of governance (administration). Despite its signatories, many countries did not exclusively implement it. Consequently, women hold only 24.3 per cent seats in both houses of the world's parliaments in January 2019 whereas 11.3 percent were in 1995, a trivial and slow progress.¹⁷

Acknowledging the importance of women's share in politics, in 1990, the Economic and Social Council of the UN set a target of 30 percent representation for women in decision-making bodies.¹⁸ In Beijing (China), the UN's Fourth World Conference on Women was held in 1995. It proposed several measures for improving the status of women. Pakistan participated in the conference and submitted a report on the status of women. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action stressed the governments to take effective measures for enhancing women's role, ensuring their share in the decision-making process.¹⁹ However, in Pakistan, specific provisions of UN conventions and conferences were not implemented and international commitments were not fulfilled. Pakistan neither enacted the CEDAW through a national law nor made its direct enforcement. Furthermore, it did not make subsequent actions, strategies, plans and policies for its implication. CEDAW also requires regular reports on women's status and the state's compliance with its obligations, which were not submitted by Pakistan. It just upgraded the Women's Division to the level of a ministry, without increasing its budget and the ministry made no significant development throughout the decade of 1990s.²⁰ It was only in August 2005, when Pakistan submitted its first report to the CEDAW Committee. In 2001, reserved seats for women were reintroduced by General Musharraf, raising Pakistan's international ranking from 100th to 58th position in the Gender Empowerment Measure index, a position higher than even the

¹⁶ Legislative Quotas for Women: A Global & South Asian Overview of Types and Numbers, *Aurat Foundation*. (July, 2012). www.af.org.pk/pub_files/1358744372.pdf

¹⁷ Inter-Parliamentary Union, Women in National Parliaments, January 2019. www.ipu.org/WMN-e/classif.htm

¹⁸ 'Legislative Quota'.

¹⁹ United Nations, Fourth World Conference on Women.

²⁰ Ayesha Khan, *Women and the Pakistan Government: A Brief Policy History (1975–1998)* (Islamabad: United Nations Development Fund, 1998), 23.

UK and the USA.²¹ The progress was visible as various reforms and policies were introduced by the regime to improve women's position.²² At sub-national levels, a change occurred after implementation of these policies and Pakistan was enlisted in those countries where women had a higher number in the local bodies. Bangladesh, India and Mongolia had already higher representation in the local government system.²³ In various states of India, the actual reservation for women in the Pachayati Raj Institution (PRI) ranges from 35 to 42 per cent. As a result, minorities and women have nearly 50 per cent of seats, which empowered them to much extent.²⁴ Unless women would not be included at all the three levels of the state; central, provincial and local, statues que is likely to continue in political, social and economic areas to marginalize them.²⁵

Local Government System in Pakistan and women empowerment

Local government is the system of decentralization of power, which is transferred from the federating units to administrative units for making uniform development, providing equal facilities to the people at grassroots levels. It is an established fact that good governance is conditional with municipal institutions, which are run by the elected representatives of the local areas. This mechanism is useful to a layman, providing a direct contact with representatives for sharing problems and needs. It is also helpful to promote gender balance indirectly. This process often leads to positive change in the political arena. No doubt, without decentralization of power, specific measures for women's development are not easy to make. In South Asian region, female members often do not partake in budgets and local planning, leaving it as men's domain. It is assumed that women prefer to perform those

²¹ Jabeen and Muhammad, 'Electoral Gender Quotas in Pakistan'.

²² Caroline Bates, *Gender Equity, Justice and Governance in Pakistan*, Aurat Foundation, August, 2014, 9-10. www.af.org.pk/gep/deskStudies/Caroline%20Bates%20final.pdf

²³ United Nations Development Programme, *Women's Representation in Local Government in Asia Pacific*, 2010. www.undp.org/.../RBAP-DG-2010-Women-Local-Government-Status-R.

²⁴ Medha Nanivadekar, *Indian Experience of Women's Quota in Local Government: Implications for Future Strategies*, October 2005, 02. https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/eql-men/docs/EP.8_rev.pdf

²⁵ Naima Tabassum, Tabassum Afzal & Huma Tabassum, 'Shifting Trends of Women's Participation in Local Government in Pakistan: A Study with Special Focus on Sindh Province,' *Mystic Thoughts: Research Journal of Sufism and Peace*, vol. I, 2015.

services/duties, which allow them to do their reproductive and domestic duties. At the same time, they expect to have policies and schedules suitable for these tasks. In South Asian countries, decentralization process is in a nascent stage relatively while institutional policies have not been yet adequately advanced to enable local governments and representative bodies to function effectively.²⁶

In August 1947, the areas constituted Pakistan inherited a fragile local government system (LGS), which was a product of the series of British attempts made from time to time through laws, reforms and commissions. All this promoted an autonomous system in certain respects, but substantially under the control of the provincial government through district officers. After independence, the government planned to establish the local institutions on the models of American parishes and communes, granting them autonomy. This model was adopted under US-sponsored Village Agricultural and Industrial Development Program of 1953, which brought rural communities in decision-making.²⁷

Punjab was the only province, where the local bodies were working in the form of village *panchayats* and municipal councils, but the majority of the members were non-elected. After independence, despite official claims, no solid steps were taken to organize the local government. Unfortunately, three military governments (Ayub Khan, 1958–69, Zia-ul-Haq, 1977–88 and Pervez Musharraf, 1999–2008) have been the architects and executors of this system, making these institutions as a means to ensure control.

General Ayub Khan occupied power in 1958 and created a well-organized local government system, introducing Basic Democracies Ordinance 1959 and the Municipal Administration Ordinance 1960. His aim was to legitimize his rule, giving it a democratic flavor. The local government system comprised of a hierarchical system of interconnected tiers. The union council was the lowest tier, which was elected on the basis of adult franchise. It also worked as the Electoral College for the elections of national and provincial assemblies and the president. In 1960, president was chosen through basic democrats and later it was legalized through a referendum. Ayub, however, implemented a mixture

²⁶ University College London, Women in Local Government in Asia and the Pacific. https://www.ucl.ac.uk/dpu-projects/drivers_urb_change/urb_society/pdf_gender/UNESCAP_Drage_Women_Local_Government_Asia_Pacific.

²⁷ Saba Gul Khattak, *Women in Local Government*, SDPI Working Paper Series No. 24 (Islamabad: Sustainable Development Policy Institute, 1996).

of unitary and presidential form of government, arguing that full fledged democracy was inappropriate for Pakistan.

Apparently, the authority was decentralized, but it had an 'extended centralized control' of the federating units, employing local bodies as a political base. Women were not given equal or special representation in local councils and were ignored in the first local bodies elections held under the BDO 1959 and no seats were reserved for them. Prior to independence, quota system (reserved seats) brought women in politics in the 1930s when the British government reserved seats for several marginalized groups based on race, religion and occupation.²⁸ In post-independence period, different measures were taken to include women in mainstream politics, particularly in legislatures, but these efforts were inadequate and nominal representation was allowed, reserving two seats for women in the 52-member House of Units and 14 seats in 314-member House of People.²⁹ However, in Ayub era, the institution of local bodies contributed a lot to empower women, introducing various reforms at the grass-roots level. The system was to ensure direct participation of people at the local level for maintaining their affairs. It was a deliberate attempt of the military regime to divert attention of people from the existence of national and provincial assemblies, filling the vacuum through lower tier. Ayub Khan's system collapsed in 1969 and finally ended in June 1971. The real spirit of decentralization of power was not his agenda, hence the undemocratic setup strengthened the military regime without promising much relief to the masses.³⁰

The first general elections held in 1970, but unfortunately the state disintegrated in 1971. The Pakistan People's Party took power and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto became the prime minister. In 1972, the provincial governments promulgated Local Government Ordinance. The 1973 constitution includes the Local Government as a non-binding issue in the section titled, 'Principles of Policy.' The article 32 explains the state's viewpoint about LG system: The State shall encourage local Government institutions composed of elected representatives of the areas concerned and in such institutions special representations will be given to peasants,

²⁸ Mona Lena Krook, *Quotas for Women in Politics: Gender and Candidate Selection Reform Worldwide*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

²⁹ Nabeela Afzal, *Women and Parliament in Pakistan, 1947-1977* (Lahore: Pakistan Study Centre, 1990), 24-25.

³⁰ Fauzia Yazdani, *Women's Representation in Local Government in Pakistan: Impact Analysis and Future Policy Implications* (Budapest: Central European University, 2004).

workers and women. Article 37 says, ‘The State shall decentralise the government administration to facilitate expeditious disposal of its business to meet the convenience and requirements of the public.’³¹ The federal government brought People’s Local Government Ordinance in 1975 to provide representation for women, minorities and workers/peasants. These laws brought some beneficial reforms in local government, but elections were never held.³² The period from 1971 to 1979 was without any local government.

In July 1977, General Zia-ul-Haq seized power from Bhutto and put the 1973 Constitution in abeyance. Once again military regime revived the LG system through provincial ordinances of 1979 in Punjab, Sindh and NWFP while the government of Balochistan passed its Local Government Ordinance in 1980. An identical LG system was promulgated in all the four provinces. No constitutional protection was given to the system. A three-tier system was introduced consisting of union council (village/ward level), tehsil council/sub-district level and the district council. Three elections of local bodies were held in 1979, 1983 and 1987 on a non-party basis. The main agenda of the regime was to neutralize the influence of political parties, thus amassing power and popularity for military regime. Women were given the two seats in each union council and 10 percent share (minimum two seats) in the district council, except Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (NWFP). Overall, 20 percent seats were reserved for women, peasants and workers while 80 per cent were elected through universal adult suffrage. These members worked as the electoral college to choose chairmen and vice chairmen (heads) of district and tehsil councils.³³ Zia kept the source of power at the center while decentralized the authority, from provinces to local level.

During these two military regimes, women’s share in policy-making was debated by the religious elements on the regimes’ behest. Both Ayub Khan and Zia-ul-Haq deliberately kept women out of the race for elected bodies. Ayub pursued a dual policy towards women; on the

³¹ Government of Pakistan, *Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan* (Islamabad: Government of Pakistan, 1973).

³² Rukhshanda Naz, ‘Training of Women Councilors in Pakistan: A Review’, November 2005. siteresources.worldbank.org/.../Resources/.../CGA-Companion; United Nations Development Programme, *Social Audit of Local Governance and Delivery of Public Services 2011- 2012*, National Report’, 2012. www.dtce.org.pk/.../Social%20Audit%20Reports/Social%20Audit%20Report%202...

³³ Khawar Mumtaz, ‘Women’s Representation, Effectiveness and Leadership in South Asia’, paper presented at the *Fifth South Asia Regional Ministerial Conference on the Celebrating Beijing Plus Ten*, Islamabad, May 2005.

one hand he introduced the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance of 1961; on the other he tried to get a fatwa (religious verdict) from the clerics against the women's headship of the state. The Zia regime exercised Sharia laws and restricted women in the name of protection of 'chaddar and chardivari' (the veil and the four walls of the house), and established Women's Division in the Cabinet Secretariat.

The constitution was restored in 1985, introducing the Eighth Amendment, which established an indirect military rule through a quasi-presidential form of government.³⁴ Moreover, electoral competition was significantly weakened when the army disqualified a large number of candidates due to party affiliation in 1979.³⁵ An important development of the period was Pakistan's becoming party to Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women adopted in Nairobi in 1985.³⁶ However, in Zia's political scheme, women were excluded from the political process and were treated equivalent to the workers/peasants or minorities in representation, i.e. having no role, authority or responsibility.

During the democratic period of 1988-1999, political power was shared twice between Benazir Bhutto (1988-90 & 1994-96) and Nawaz Sharif (1990-93 & 1997-99). Khattak (2012) wrote that the 'LG system became an 'on-again, off-again' phenomenon as each government attempted to garner political support by (re)instituting or undoing the LG system.'³⁷ No local government elections were conducted during Benazir Bhutto's tenure. Above it, all elected local bodies, sooner or later, were dismissed. Women's participation in the local government was only two percent till 1991-93 and then it was increased to 10 percent.

During the first tenure of Nawaz Sharif, local bodies' elections were held across the country, but in the second term, elections were held only in Punjab and Balochistan. In 1998, 100 percent increase was announced in the local government by the federal government. However, increase in reserved seats for women was nominal, for example, in the district and town councils of Punjab, it was just 3.7 percent (905 to 1,368). The same trend was visible in other provinces. Despite elections, these elected representatives never became office bearers and the system

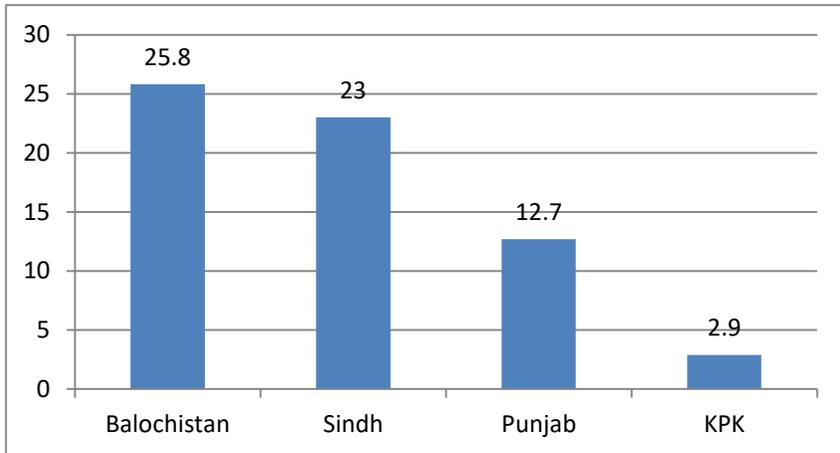
³⁴ Omer Noman, *Pakistan: Political and Economic History since 1947* (London: Kegan Paul, 1988).

³⁵ Muhammad Waseem, 'One Step Forward', in *Pakistan 1997*, edited by C. Baxter and C. Kennedy (London: Westview Press, 1997).

³⁶ Bates, *Gender Equity*, 10.

³⁷ Saba Gul Khattak, 'Women in Local Government: The Pakistan Experience', *IDS Bulletin*, 41:5, September 2010.

was barely functional in this period.³⁸ The following graph shows women's representation in LG in 1998:



Source: Naz, 2005.

The constitution primarily placed the LG on the 'concurrent list,' authorizing both federal and provincial government to legislate, but practically, central government left it to the provincial discretion and variation in seats was the result of various provincial purviews. Invariably military regimes established local government system to undermine the political power, particularly of the feudal aristocracy and big landowners at national and provincial levels. Contrary to it, democratic governments relied on making alliances with landlords and feudal leaders to secure their vote bank, and these elite classes never favored the transfer of authority to common people at the local level. These varying interests witnessed the patronage of the military regimes for local governments and their dissolution or discontinuation by democratic governments, hence gender quota was never target of any government.³⁹ Thus, women's representation remained marginal until the Musharraf's military regime came to power.

The Devolution of Power Plan and women empowerment

General Pervez Musharraf took power on October 12, 1999 through a bloodless military coup d'état that overthrew the elected government. He introduced a process of decentralization of power known as the 'Devolution of Power' in January 2000. About this event, Yazdani wrote,

³⁸ Tabassum, Afzal & Tabassum, 'Shifting Trends', 2015.

³⁹ Mumtaz, *Women's Representation*.

'In Pakistan's political history, many events have led to changes in its democratic discourses for better or worse; one of them was in October 1999 which was a blow to democratic journey of Pakistan yet it proved to be a blessing in disguise for women.'⁴⁰ Devolution plan was implemented after a series of local government elections, which ended in September 2001. For devolving the power to the grassroots level, National Reconstruction Bureau (NRB) was created with multidimensional tasks, but the most important was the devolution of power to empower women and the marginalized groups. The NRB put forward the Local Government Plan in 2000 and finally promulgated it on August 14, 2001 through provincial governments. The important feature of the Local Government Ordinance 2001 was the allocation of 33 percent seats for women in local government.⁴¹ These seats were directly elected for union councils and indirectly for the above two tiers. Endorsing Pakistan's international commitments and decades long efforts of the civil society for women's representation, the Musharraf regime established a permanent National Commission on Status of Women (NCSW) in 2000.⁴² Like the previous traditions, the military regime stepped forward to facilitate women, a responsibility, ignored by the democratically elected governments.

At the national level, 60 seats were reserved in the National Assembly and 17 in the Senate. This allocation not only empowered women, but also gave Pakistan a better ranking in gender empowerment. In earlier years, this reservation exceeded from three percent to ten percent only. The Constitution of 1973 reserved ten seats for ten years or three general elections, whichever occurred later. It was assumed that women would gain necessary experience in this span of time and would

⁴⁰ Yazdani, *Women's Representation*.

⁴¹ 'Devolution Row: An Assessment of Pakistan's 2001 Local Elections, 2010, 9. www.clingendael.nl/sites/.../20101119_CRU_publicatie_mmezzor; National Reconstruction Bureau (2002). *The Local Government Book*, Islamabad,=1

⁴² First time the Commission on the Status of Women was established in 1984 during the Zia regime on the recommendations of the Women's Rights Committee of 1976. However, the commission's recommendations for 20 per cent tickets to women were not endorsed by political parties. Another Commission on the Status of Women was established during the Benazir Bhutto's government. Its agenda was to examine and repeal the discriminatory Hudood Ordinances. It also proposed 33 per cent reserved seats for women through direct elections and joint electorate. However, these proposals were never materialized. The permanent Commission on the Status of Women was established by Musharraf regime.

be able to contest elections for general seats at par with men, thus negating the need for special provisions. This calculation proved wrong and after the lapse of this provision in 1988, women's representation was nominal in all the next elections. In this transitional phase, diverse viewpoints were floating in campaigns for reserved seats and all were not advocating them, showing reservation about the norms of a pragmatic society and viewing them as a constraint to women's role, ignoring the fact that Pakistani society and women were not yet raised to the level of the developed countries.⁴³

Devolution Plan was largely hailed by women as the reserved seats strengthened women's position. Since long, gender activists and human rights agencies had been demanding as Krook wrote, 'Women have to campaign for reserved seats in Pakistan reach back nearly seventy years, with the first decisions to institute quotas appearing in 1935 and the most recent reforms taking place in 2002.'⁴⁴ Reservation policies made an indelible impact on women's representation as a large number participated in the elections. At the local level, significantly more investment is made for road construction, health care centers, drinking water, etc. In local assemblies, elected women devote more time and energy to female-specific issues and make attempts for legislation on women's problems. In spite of their low-literacy rate, they have been articulating their power, and making attempts to make their ways in the existing bureaucratic and political system.

Women's participation and representation in elections of local government

The elections of all three-tier of local government were held in five phases from December 2000 to August 2001, including nazim/mayor and naib nazim/vice-mayor. In the first phase, 2,621 women contested for 1,867 reserved seats, ignoring the calls of social and certain religious leaders who prevented them from becoming part of politics. Despite it, female candidates were elected unopposed in 40 percent of districts.⁴⁵ In this round, women won all reserved seats that were either reserved for women or workers/peasants. Its appreciable feature was the entrance of those women in assemblies who first time contested elections and their

⁴³ Mussarat Jabeen & Sajid M. Awan, 'Gender Quotas as an Instrument for Women's Empowerment in Legislatures', *FJWU Journal of Social Sciences*, 11:1 (Summer, 2017), 133.

⁴⁴ Krook, *Quota for Women*, 58.

⁴⁵ Farzana Bari, *Local Government Elections December, 2000 (phase one)*, Islamabad: Pattan Development Corporation, 2001.

number was more than half of the elected women.⁴⁶ Recognizing the need of training for newly elected female-councilors, governmental agencies and various national and international NGOs arranged workshops for them. In the elections, conducted in five phases, total reserved seats for women were 39,964. Table 1 provides the details.

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

Tier	Number of Councils	Total Seats	Reserved Seats for Women	Percentage of Women Seats
Union Council	6022	126,462	36,066	28.5
Tehsil Council	305	8,192	1,749	21.4
Town Council	30	773	161	20.8
District Council	96	8,806	1,988	22.6

Source: Naeem Mirza, *Women's Participation Local Government Election 2000-2001*, Islamabad: Aurat Foundation, 2002.

In these elections, it was encouraging that success ratio of women was 90 percent in all five phases of elections except the last one where the success ratio was 65 percent, because in this phase, elections were held in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK). There the tribal culture along with religious traditions affected women's representation. Even fatwas were announced against women's participation. Election Commission of Pakistan (2002) also recognized the reality and attributed it to conservatism, prevailing in KPK and Balochistan where the male members of the families did not allow their womenfolk to take part in the elections. Punjab showed a better trend as 97 percent seats were filled while not a single seat was vacant in thirty town committees. The

⁴⁶ Socorro L. Reyes, 'Quotas for Women for Legislative Seats at the Local Level in Pakistan.' English version of the paper presented at the International IDEA Workshop, Jakarta, Indonesia, 2002. www.idea.int/publications/wip/upload/CS_Pakistan_Reynes.pdf

position in other tiers was also encouraging, showing.⁴⁷ Overall in tehsil councils, filled seats were 96 percent, while in town and district councils, it were 95 and 95.8 percent respectively. Sindh also had the positive result.⁴⁸ Table 2 provides details of the five phases.

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 Elections	December 31, 2000	March 21, 2001	May 31, 2001	July 2, 2001	August 9, 2001
Punjab	08	10	09	08	----
Sindh	03	04	07	05	----
KPK	04	04	01	07	08
Balochistan	03	02	03	11	03
Total Districts	18	20	20	31	11

Source: Election Commission of Pakistan, *Local Government Elections Report 2000-01*. Islamabad: ECP.

Overall in this period, it was estimated that LG Ordinance has brought approximately 40,000 women in the local bodies.⁴⁹ In the previous system, the number of female participants was around 17,400.⁵⁰ Though there were some difficulties and not all reserved seats were filled yet the change was visible confirming a significant opportunity for women. It was also noted that a cultural change occurred as 67,000 women were nominated, which showed families and society's acceptance of their new role.⁵¹ Under this system, nazim (head of district council), naib nazim (deputy head) and members of the union council were elected on the basis of universal adult franchise. The naib nazims of union councils by default were the members of taluka/tehsil councils while all the nazims

⁴⁷ Aurat Foundation, *Citizens' Campaigns for Women's Participation in Local Government Elections 2001 & 2005* (December 13, 2005). www.af.org.pk/Citizens%20Reports/.../Citizens%20campaigns.pdf

⁴⁸ Mirza, *Women's Participation*.

⁴⁹ Gender Review of Political Framework for Women's Political Participation, *National Commission on the Status of Women*, 2010. http://www.ncsw.gov.pk/prod_images/pub/Report_Political_Parties_Order.pdf

⁵⁰ *Report on the State of Women in Urban Local Government Pakistan*, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2000. <http://www.unescap.org/huset/women/reports/pakistan>.

⁵¹ Bates, *Women's Representation*.

of union councils were the members of the district councils. In addition, they served as an electoral college to elect the *nazim* and *naib nazim* of the district council and members of reserved seats of all three tiers.⁵²

Reduction in seats of local government and Elections 2005

All the four provincial governments were reluctant to share authority and resources with the local bodies and they wanted some fundamental changes in the LGO before the next elections so they made it a pre-condition for accepting this tier of governance. This pressure led the central government hence the LGO was finally amended on June 6, 2005. The number of seats was reduced from 21 to 13 in a union council and women's reserved seats were reduced from six to four, however, the proportional representation of quota seats was not changed. Overall the number came down from 36,066 to 24,528 in union councils, which put negative impact on the numerical strength of women.⁵³ However, women covered this gap with increased participation and more women stepped forward and contested elections on general seats in comparison to 2001. Women wanted to preserve their efforts and gains achieved over the last twenty years. In 2001, total nominations were 61,411, which was 1.7 percent per seat, while in 2005, nominations were 57,275 which was 2.3 percent per seat.⁵⁴ Even in Balochistan and Khyber Pukhtunkhwa, ratio of vacant seat was very low at tehsil and district councils. Actually, women were not ready to lose those gains, which could be increased through representation only. According to a report, the reason in reduction of seats was not clear.⁵⁵ In the 2005 elections, huge number of former lady councilors joined political parties for getting support in elections, whereas several mainstream parties criticized the reserved seats and indirectly the military regime, too. Women resented the criticism and responded that their agenda was to secure their position and to avoid the allegations of the future governments, which may blame them for non-participation or unwillingness to contest the elections. Under the LGO, the elections of 2001 and 2005 were conducted on non-party basis.

Despite the reduction in seats, the results of the elections of 2005 were very encouraging and they expanded the space for women in local politics. In the first phase, elections were held in the union councils of 54

⁵² Tabassum, Afzal & Tabassum, 'Shifting Trends', 18.

⁵³ Aurat Foundation, *Citizens' Campaigns for Women's Participation*.

⁵⁴ Khattak, *Women in Local Government*, 53.

⁵⁵ Social Policy and Development Center, *Social Development in Pakistan: Devolution and Human Development in Pakistan* (Karachi: SPDC, 2007).

districts and 98.3 percent reserved seats were filled. In the second phase, elections were contested in 56 districts and the results showed that 95.63 percent reserved seats were filled. Other achievements included the mobilization of 156,925 women for elections, training of 40,178 female candidates, and coaching of 112,298 women in ‘facilitation camps,’ arranged by different NGOs. In addition, NGOs helped women for registration as voters and getting national identity card (NIC).⁵⁶

In an overall review, the reduction of seats in 2005 weakened women’s representation to some extent. Comparing with other countries about the ratio of total number of persons for one elected member, there is found a huge gap. In India, for example, a woman council represents 1,000 persons. In Nepal, its ratio is one to four hundred, whereas in Pakistan, one woman is representative of approximately 8000 persons.⁵⁷

The next elections were to be held in 2009 but the general elections of 2008 changed the situation, giving a truncated mandate to the Pakistan Peoples’ Party (PPP). A coalition government was established, which rescheduled the elections of local bodies, showing concern about the security situation prevailing in the country.⁵⁸ The system remained in working till 2010 and after that, a temporary system was established under the administrators.

After the 18th Amendment in the constitution, each province designed and implemented its own policy. The options pursued by the provinces were political and they adopted positions appropriate to their interests. Subsequently, deadlock emerged in Punjab, Sindh and KPK whereas Balochistan legislated for local government elections and became the first province for conducting elections on the party basis. Under the Balochistan Local Government Act 2010 (amended in 2013-14), elections were to be held in two phases; direct and indirect. The second phase was for the reserved seats. The amended Act 2014 was promulgated on January 24, 2014 introducing a new category. It reserved five percent seats for the professionals/social workers and merged the existing categories of workers and peasants into one. Nevertheless, the Balochistan High Court (BHC) decided on May 23, 2014 that the amendment was repugnant to the constitution.⁵⁹ The provincial

⁵⁶ Maliha Zia, *Aurat Foundation’s Annual Report 2006 & 2007*, June 2009. www.af.org.pk/.../2006-07/Annual%20Report%202006-07_final.

⁵⁷ *Local Bodies System*.

⁵⁸ *Friday Times*, 4-10 March 2011.

⁵⁹ Devolution Trust Community Empowerment, Balochistan’s Local Government Elections. *Local Government Watch*, 9 June 2014. http://dtce.org.pk/DTCE/public/LG_Watch_04/LG_Watch_04.htm

assemblies of Punjab, Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa passed their LG Acts in 2013, taking three more years. All these Acts approved elections on party basis. The structure and tenure of local bodies have also been changed as all provinces have chosen options suitable to their interests. After provincial control, the electoral process varies across provinces.⁶⁰ In Balochistan, elections were held in three phases and 7,190 general seats were filled in the first phase, which was held on December 7, 2013. After six months of the first phase, elections for the reserved seats for women (2,335) and other categories were conducted on May 29, 2014. The final phase was completed in December 2014. Except a few troubled areas, polls were held throughout the province.⁶¹ The positive aspect of these elections was inclusion of political parties and 33 percent seats for women. For other provinces, elections' schedule (2015) was announced by the Election Commission of Pakistan.

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, elections of local government were held on May 30, 2015. The local governments were formed after a span of six years. It was established that local governments would work under the provincial framework, while a four-year term was fixed. In Punjab and Sindh, elections were held in late 2015. In Punjab, elections were held in three phases; 31 October, 19 November and 05 December 2015 while elections for the reserved seats of the municipal committees and union councils were held in November 17 and November 19, 2016 respectively. In district councils, elections for reserved seats were held on November 15, 2016. Polling for chairmen, vice chairmen, mayors and deputy mayors was held on December 22, 2016 whereas elections for one Metropolitan Corporation, 35 District Councils and 11 Municipal Corporations were held on the same date.⁶² As a drastic cut occurred in the reserved seats for women in both Punjab and Sindh despite experiencing a high contestation ratio in 2005, the number of women seats was reduced to 15 per cent for union councils and 10 per cent in the higher councils. However, KPK kept the same ratio and allocated 33 per

⁶⁰ In Punjab, chairmen/vice-chairmen of the union councils would come through direct elections while in Sindh, indirect election of these posts would be envisaged through a panel of nine councilors elected to the reserved and general seats. Punjab, Sindh and Balochistan have union councils and district councils in the rural areas and union councils/committees and municipal committees in the urban areas. The KPK has neighbourhood councils in urban areas and village council and Tehsil Councils in the rural areas.

⁶¹ *Dawn*, 01 January 2015.

⁶² Election Commission of Pakistan, 28 December 2016.
<https://www.ecp.gov.pk/>

cent seats to women. Later, Sindh also revised the reserved seats, increasing from 22 to 33 percent. An amendment in the Sindh Local Government Act 2013, has increased political representation of women at the local level, which would be helpful in resolving women's problems.⁶³

The ECP blamed the provincial governments for delay in the elections, due to lack of political will. The limbo in terms of local government has not only indicated the number of challenges to the governance but deprived women of their representation. It also cut down their opportunity to advance their interests by engaging them at local level.⁶⁴

Analyzing the profile of elected women of LG, it becomes obvious that politics is no more a male domain as those women contested elections whose families have no political background and candidates themselves have no experience of this thorny field. It was calculated from the available data that 60 percent women were relatively younger (less than 45 years), 75 percent had a domestic background, 73.7 percent were housewives, and 50 percent of them were illiterate.⁶⁵ Apart from factors, it is also one reason for not impacting the desired change in the socio-political field. As far as the socioeconomic status of elected women is concerned, the Asian Development Bank (2003) reported that 32 percent of them were financially dependent upon their families belonging to middle or working class, while 52 percent came off poor families. Only three percent women belonged to upper class while 13 percent came from the upper middle class.⁶⁶

Opportunities and barriers for women's participation and representation in Local Government System

Women's participation in decision-making processes is critical for gender parity and sustainable development. Unfortunately, women are not well represented in politics around the world, as they face a number

⁶³ *Dawn*, 29 April 2016; Democracy Report International, Sindh Local Government Elections Assessment, January 2016. file:///C:/Users/HPGv66/Documents/Local%20Govt%20and%20Women/dri-pk_eam_si_report_vol_en_2016-03-10.pdf

⁶⁴ Atif Butt, 'ECP announces Elections for Local Bodies', *Dawn*, 6 February 2015.

⁶⁵ UNDP, *Social Audit of Local Governance*.

⁶⁶ Asian Development Bank, *Devolution in Pakistan: Preparing for Service Delivery Improvements*, 2003.

of obstacles, ranging from traditional culture to the patriarchal setting of political institutions and practices to create gender-oriented administrative structure. However, nature of challenges and opportunities vary with the political environment of a country. It ranges from equality within the political arena to access to social media, control of resources for contesting elections and launching a campaign in a trying atmosphere for securing their representation. In this section, opportunities and challenges to women's representation and participation have been discussed.

a. It is observed that women's inclusion in the decision-making process makes them more responsible, creating a sense of better status and leadership role. They make efforts to move from local to upper level and leadership positions in pursuit of a political career. Grooming at grassroots level enables them to display better abilities at a higher position, e.g. provincial, national and even international levels. Several lady councilors became members of provincial assemblies in Pakistan and the same is case of India. There are examples of women who first served as mayors in local bodies and later became ministers in provincial governments or representatives of state in the United Nations and other international forums. For example, Hameeda Waheeduddin, the nazim of a union council of Mandi Bahauddin (a district of Punjab), contested the general elections of 2002 on general seat and became a member and minister of the Punjab's provincial assembly and was re-elected in 2013 and 2018. In general elections of 2008, six former councilors were elected on reserved seats in the provincial assembly of Punjab. These women were members of the Women Councilors Network (WCN).⁶⁷

On the hind side of the picture, the leadership position of women in local governance is equally thorny, because they have to face great difficulty while tackling the odd situations, particularly the male opposition. Members of WCN made complaints of gender-biased behavior as their male colleagues tried to make women realize that politics was not a legitimate field for women. In both capacities, they were not empowered. Nevertheless, the people of their areas looked towards them for the solution of their problems. Generally, male politicians discourage women's leadership, alleging of low efficiency in their work, lack of self-confidence, poor working style, absence of teamwork and less influencing power and several such others common concerns.

⁶⁷ Shugufta Umer, Personal Communication, 23 July 2016.

Contrary to Indian local government, Pakistan did not reserve seats for women in the category of nazim and naib-nazim. In 101 districts, only two women were elected as nazims, one from Khairpur and the other from Tando Allah Yar in 2001. Both belonged to strong political families of Sindh. Several other women contested elections on these seats and 16 became successful.⁶⁸ Expressing women's grievances, a lady councilor inquired ICG, 'If the military government was really serious about empowering women rather than appeasing donors, it would have reserved a share of nazim slots at the district and tehsil levels'.⁶⁹ In 2013, the former US secretary of state and Chairperson of National Democratic Institute, Madeleine K. Albright commented, 'Every country deserves to have the best possible leader and that means that women have to be given a chance to compete. If they're never allowed to compete in the electoral process then the countries are really robbing themselves of a great deal of talent'.⁷⁰ It clearly explains that women are equal partners and their role cannot be overlooked in the decision-making process.

- b. Another issue is the patriarchal setting of the political institutions, which challenge women's control of institutions and economic assets. Their voice is also suppressed or ignored in different processes of decision-making with various patterns of negligence pursued by the masculine establishments. Actually, women's role is influenced by a wide range of traditional and theoretical notions, which deliberately link it with their domestic role. There are different ways of keeping women from communication, cooperation, and decision-making processes. Sometimes male relatives preclude women from joining assembly's sessions or meetings on a regular basis. In their view, nominal participation is sufficient instead of an active role. They give little importance to women's representation in local affairs. There are examples when women were pushed into politics from their male relatives to secure seats with hope to

⁶⁸ Saima Javaid & Asmatulla Khan, 'Woman Participation in Local Government System and its Impact on Development of Balochistan: A Case Study of Quetta District', *Journal of applied and Emerging Sciences*, 1:2 (April 2006). [www.buitms.edu.pk/.../14 Woman%20participation%20in%20local%20](http://www.buitms.edu.pk/.../14%20Woman%20participation%20in%20local%20).

⁶⁹ International Crisis Group, *Devolution in Pakistan: Reforms or Regression* (Islamabad/ Brussels: International Crisis Group, 22 March 2004).

⁷⁰ Melanne Verveen & Kim K. Azzarelli, *Fast Forward: How Women can Achieve Power and Purpose* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2015), 60.

continue control, however, they were not allowed to attend council's session, which disappointed them.⁷¹ In fact, males with such approach, focus on those ideologies that divide labour on a sexual base, defining women's roles in their homes and men's role in the public life. This political culture and behaviour simply mirror the patriarchy in politics.

- c. The availability of offices and places to sit and perform the duties is a big issue in local bodies. The majority of the lady councilors have not been provided offices or rooms. There is resentment among lady councilors of all tiers of LG about this issue. After attending the official meetings, they had to leave the meeting hall and no other place is available to stay there. This functional constraint was found throughout Pakistan. Realizing this discriminatory practice and inferior status, women feel politics as being an inappropriate field to some extent. Absence of supportive infrastructure further decreases working ability of women in general and councilors in particular. Without proper offices, voters' access to the elected women is not easy.
- d. Women are assumed to perform dual duties at home and office because their entrance into politics or other working places is designed by the state on 'sex specific terms.' The ideological and political factors compounded with women's familial responsibilities leave less time and space for them to aspire for political roles. There is a little or no recognition of their unpaid labour within household matters. Women have to consume a lot of time, energy and resources in performing several domestic duties. This type of labour is generally known as 'the double working day.' It is a horrible reality with a simple consequence that women are perceived as 'busy people.' When they are not engaged with the household and children as mates and mothers, they are supposed to work on paid jobs or having a role in offices or other institutions. While deciding the time and schedule of the meetings, women's duties in the household and community are rarely considered and meetings are not arranged in family-friendly times. Their civic participation is constrained due to timing. That is why a large number of women are unable to attend the meeting on a regular basis. Political parties and local governments are responsible to some extent for unaccommodating behavior towards women when fixing time for political meetings or constructing a schedule of election campaigns. They might have their own justifications.
- e. The political parties in Pakistan, more or less, have become political dynasties with no inner democratic setting as regular elections are not

⁷¹ Personal communication with lady councilors.

held within the party rows. Women in politics are either from the elite class or middle class and later are comparatively at a disadvantageous position both in party and community. Over the years, increasing number of women in different political parties has not been translated into their elevation in the party hierarchy. Women are not equally treated except in special cases. It is also deplorable that parties do not take female candidates seriously and there is no guarantee that same women will get tickets or nominations for the same seats in the next elections. This gesture discourages those women who want to make politics as their career. Failure in getting the nomination or ticket, continuity in this profession is lost to some extent. Apart from it, women become victim to the party structure while making a choice between a political career and family life and here women's priorities and concerns are seldom endorsed in party manifestos. This attitude sometimes, force women to choose a family life rather than political career. Furthermore, women's weak financial position is also a pretext for denying them party tickets, showing parties' inability for providing financial support to launch the election campaigns. Apart from it, parties frequently try to trace those women whom they can manipulate to run the ward.

- f. Traditions and cultural beliefs equally contribute to determine subordinate position of women defining their roles in domestic and public sectors. Their political participation is constrained by the fabric of social, cultural, economic, and institutional structures, which are operating within discursive frameworks. The dichotomy of the public-private explains politics as a male prerogative. Despite having the constitutional rights, traditions pose hurdle to exercise them. Above it, women are not in the position to contest the elections without consent of their families. There are many reported incidents when women were denied to cast their votes or to contest the election on the basis of the joint decisions of the local communities and political parties. Nazia Mumtaz, a strong candidate from Bhalwal (Punjab), wanted to contest elections of local bodies, but was killed in December 2000. Her husband had objections on her candidacy.⁷²
- g. Women are discouraged to run political offices and this practice undermines their self-confidence in politics. Traditionally, in rural areas of Pakistan, women have limited access to financial resources, which makes them dependent on families, impeding their path. Decision power also lies with the males in families and women have

⁷² Amnesty International, *Pakistan Insufficient Protection of Women*, 17 April 2002, ASA 33/006/2002. <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/116000/asa330062002en.pdf>

to follow them be it financial matters or social interaction. There is a little or no room in politics to raise such type of issues as these are attributed to women's personal matters, which cannot be shared or discussed in public. In reality, this perception is constructed by the masculine feature of society, where support and space are not available to women on preferential terms. Access to information, family support and transportation are also insufficient for them. In several districts of the KPK, religious leaders sought to prevent women from contesting elections for reserved seats, threatening their families with social boycotts, which meant losing access to public goods and services such as water supply or pastures for cattle grazing. They also tried to persuade judges to invalidate female candidacies. There were many instances in Mardan, Dhir and Swabi districts where women were not allowed to participate in elections as a candidate or voter in 2001. Because the elders of the areas forced the people to keep women away from politics attributing it as a violation of the honour of the tribe and the family.⁷³ Due to involvement of conservative and religious groups in such practices, more than six hundred reserved seats were not filled in KPK.⁷⁴ These groups did it through various acts of intimidation to dissuade women from stepping forward as candidates or voters. In several districts, election officers rejected women's nomination papers with minor objections and advised them to concentrate on their household instead of running a political office.⁷⁵ However, different NGOs attempted to handle the situation and it was estimated that 85 to 90 percent women's seats were contested during the first two phases of the elections of 2000-01.⁷⁶

- h. Another form of constraints on women's political representation is denial of access to proceeding of local bodies. It was observed in previous local governments that women were deliberately kept away from meetings' sessions as they received delayed information about the schedule of meetings. This was a frequent complaint among lady councilors of union councils. They also complained that the nazims did not allow them to speak at the meetings. In a number of personal communications, lady councilors shared different incidents when

⁷³ Amnesty International, *Pakistan Insufficient Protection*, 24; Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2002: Events of 2001*. Washington (US): Library of Congress, 2004, 248.

⁷⁴ Reyes, 'Quota for Women', 2.

⁷⁵ Bari, *Local Government*.

⁷⁶ Mirza, *Women's Participation*.

they protested against the partiality of male nazims and staged walkouts. Even in some districts, honorarium (Azazia) was not given to the elected women, while lady councilors of the union councils did not receive an honorarium across the provinces, ignoring the fact that the majority of them belonged to lower income groups.⁷⁷

- i. It was highlighted in several reports of NGOs that women were not consulted in budget formulation by the nazims. Furthermore, women's physical participation was not mandatory for the budget sessions and their signatures were taken later on relevant papers. For rural schemes, development funds were allocated to women councilors, but monitoring of the civil work of their projects was denied to them. They were only rubber stamps to endorse the completion of projects. However, women councilors resisted this situation and even protested against this biased attitude as was reported in different case studies.⁷⁸ Another reason for ignoring lady-councilors in decision-making was the provisions of the Punjab Local Government Ordinance (PLGO), which require a simple majority for decisions. There is no legal obligation for the nazims to include female members in procedure. Another anomaly was low development funds for women-specific projects like vocational centers or distribution of sewing machines, because nazims did not approve such projects.⁷⁹
- j. About the electoral process, it is perceived that it is fraught with violence, corruption and threats to the self-esteem of the candidates. All this is sufficient to prevent women's entry in politics. Simultaneously, absence of accountability and lack of transparency in the system of local-bodies have reduced the status, credibility and respect among the people. Corruption in funds had further worsened the position and such practices reduce the institutional credibility. There are other social and psychological reasons like physical attacks on lady councilors and their relatives/supporters, which create insecurity among female councilors and their families.⁸⁰

The role of LGs for land management is also crucial. This level has been taken as the right place for addressing land disputes in a more responsive way in their respective areas. LGs are in the position to

⁷⁷ *Local Bodies System.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Shirin M. Rai, 'Reserved Seats in South Asia: A Regional Perspective' in *Women in Parliament: Beyond Number*, edited by Julie Ballington and Azza Karam (Stockholm: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2005).

⁸⁰ Tabassum, Afzal & Tabassum, 'Shifting Trends'.

explore new and innovative approaches to manage land disputes. It is worth underlining that rights of land, property and shelter are not equally shared with women, ignoring the facts that these are their societal and legal right. In several African countries, gender equality policy refers to women's right of shelter and security, and addressing violence against them. The registration of land or property in the name of a male member of the couple is no more in practice there.⁸¹

Conclusion

The political system is to incorporate the interests of all segments of society and women being half of the population are assumed to have equal right of participation in political institutions. First time in the history of local government of Pakistan, women have been given one third of representation in 2000-01. Their participation in local government has been taken as a signal to create gender balance and gender sensitive policies. The increased number of the reserved seats and under-representation worked as driving factors to bring a large number of women into politics and they stepped forward to take their share. From a voter to an elected member, they made attempts to show their existence and performance. The high number of women candidates translated in a corresponding escalation in the number of elected members. Elections of 2001 and 2005 witnessed full participation of women at all three tiers. In 2005, despite reduction in seats, women's ratio as candidates was higher not only on general seats, but also on the reserved seats. Their effective participation is aimed to preserve the gains, which they have earned through numerical increase. Next elections were held from 2013 to 2016 in the four provinces with fewer vacant reserved seats, and showing the same trend. Representation has provided women a position to advocate their perspectives in policies and law-making. Entrance in LGs is also one reason for women's move to higher levels of assemblies. LG has worked as nurseries for politics, making women more responsible and responsive to the challenges and realities, that prevent them to become part of mainstream politics. It has altered the societal perspective regarding women's role in politics. The voters now appreciate their performance. Several pro-women policies and legislation are also the result of their advocacy and involvement.

Despite all this, administrative structure of local bodies is continued to accommodate men on senior leadership positions. The

⁸¹ UN Women, 'Realizing Women's Rights to Land and other Productive Resources, 2013'. www.ohchr.org/Documents/.../RealizingWomensRightstoLand.pdf

reserved seats have not worked to the level, where women's strength is measured equal to men. Women's efforts to access senior posts are not successful as gendered barriers remain there to prevent them. There are wide variations in selection of women candidates by political parties as patriarchal norms and practices work within the political system and political parties, which led them to overlook women for electoral offices and keep them to nomination only. Cultural norms, social values and traditions are still encumbering the path and one third share or reserved seats alone are not sufficient to remove the disparities. Women's rating is still lower as different obstacles are there to slow down their performance.

Gender face of politics (female) is now publicly acknowledged, but theoretical attempts are being made to secure it, whereas practical measures are required to preserve it. Here are certain recommendations to remove this disparity as men and women have different perspectives and viewpoints about social and political matters. Women's inclusion in policy-making involves a balanced approach towards decision-making. Only the physical presence of female councillors in local politics does not mean that the interests and welfare of females have been incorporated and secured. Women's political participation must not be limited to numerical strength, but their contribution in decision-making, planning and active involvement are crucial for sustainable development. There should be a transparent and accountable process of candidate selection in the political institutions. The success of LG is conditioned with its ability to influence institutional rules, norms, practices and consequently shaping the policy agenda about the allocation of resources. Its impact would provide benefits, capabilities and good governance, which would ultimately address the gender disparities indirectly. It must be remembered that the integration of women in institutions enhances their quality and credibility at both local or global levels. Local government is to fulfill the needs of both women and men and it should build on the experiences, perspectives and viewpoints of both in social and political matters. Consequently, a balanced approach in decision-making would become visible.