

WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to review the patterns of women's representation in National Assembly of Pakistan. The review is based on secondary sources. The data was gathered about number of women elected on reserved, general and minority seats in the National Assembly of Pakistan in different time periods. The main argument is that there was marginal representation of women in National Assembly till 2002. The situation remained same in both military and democratic governments. The number of women in National Assembly increased with the increase of political quota allocation for them in the year 2002. Women mostly enter the house on reserved seats. Women elected on general seats were less in number; as it was difficult for women to win on general seats. Only one woman could ever get elected on minority seat in National Assembly. The mode of election for women on reserved seats was always indirect. There is need for further measures to make women's participation equal to men.

Keywords: Women, quota, National Assembly, Pakistan.

INTRODUCTION

Pakistan is a patriarchal society. Women are ascribed to lower status than men in all aspects of social and political life. They are lagging behind in educational and labor force participation. Female literacy rate is lower. They are less in and get dropped out early from the formal educational sector. Their participation in paid labor force is low. The economic worth of their unpaid work in household and family fields is not recognized yet. They are facing several victimizing socio-cultural evil practices (e.g. domestic violence, honor killings, forced marriages, exchange marriages, etc.). The law does not sufficiently to protect them from victimization. Rather, several discriminatory laws (e.g. Hudood Ordinances and law of evidence) were the tools to legitimize and institutionalize women's lower status and victimization for a long time.

In large part, the vulnerable condition of women is due to a socially accepted lower status of women and lack of autonomy and decision making authority given to them. They lack decision in both public and private spheres. The gender sensitive social policy and law making in the state political institutions (e.g. National Assembly and Senate) is essential for altering the socio-cultural configurations in order to improve women's status in society and curb violence against them. The aim can be achieved only when women will have equal access and participation at national level legislatures and political institutions. The equal participation may help to bring their interests on floors to influence the social policy, legislation, and distribution of resources for their benefit. Accordingly, this paper aims to review the patterns of women's representation in the National Assembly of Pakistan.

METHODOLOGY

The paper is based on a review of women's participation in National Assembly of Pakistan in different periods of time. The review is done through collection of secondary data and comparative study of different time periods in the political and parliamentary history of Pakistan. The data was gathered and categorized to understand the legislative and Constitutional quota reservation for women, their overall presence in the house, the number of women elected on general, reserved and minority seats in the National Assembly in different periods of time. The data gathered was analyzed for presentation in descriptive and graphical forms.

WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN the NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF PAKISTAN

Muslim women played an important role in independence movement for Pakistan. But they were given a poor share in the political and legislative institutions of a newly established state. After independence in 1947, the first constituent assembly included only two women representatives; Begum Shaista Ikramullah and Begum Jahanara Shah Nawaz. It was no more than 2.5% of the total strength of the assembly. The political scene in the first decade after independence was dominated by the established politicians (especially the landlords) of pre-independence period which made the raise of any woman to political forums more difficult (Rashid,

1978:169; Hussain, 1979:4; Hussain, 1976). Therefore, after the dissolution of first constituent assembly no woman was elected to the second constituent assembly in 1955 (Mumtaz, 1998:354). The first Constitution was promulgated in 1956. The article 44(2) of the Constitution reserved 10 seats for women out of a total strength of 310 seats in National Assembly for next ten years. The overall 3% quota reservation for women was prescribed. The women seats were based on territorial representation, by delimiting the women's territorial constituencies, through direct elections.

Without any elections held, the Constitution of 1956 was abrogated. General Ayub Khan, imposed first martial law and occupied the office of President of the country in 1958. The new Constitution promulgated in 1962. The Article 20(2) of the Constitution defined for 6 reserved seats for women out of total 156 seats in the National Assembly of Pakistan (Shirkat Gah, 2009). The overall quota reservation for women was taken to 3.8% of the total strength of the house. This Constitution introduced indirect election of the women on reserved seats by an electoral college of elected members of the National Assembly. The indirect mode of election made it impossible for any woman to contest election without the backing of male landowners-dominated assembly in 1962 election. Only 6 women on reserved seats were elected to sit in National Assembly; 3 from East Pakistan and 3 from West Pakistan. The elections in 1965 were held under 1962 Constitution giving women representation on reserved seats through indirect mode of election. Six women returned to the National Assembly on reserved seats; again three from each East Pakistan and West Pakistan, but none on any general seat (Shirkat Gah, 2009).

Later the mass upheavals against Ayub Khan in 1969 led to second Martial Law imposed by General Yahya Khan. The 1962 Constitution was abrogated and the next elections were held in 1970 under the Legal Framework Order (LFO) of General Yahya Khan's military regime. LFO, under its section IV(1), reserved 13 seats out of 313 for women to be elected in National Assembly through indirect mode of election. Six seats were to be filled by women candidates from West Pakistan and seven from East Pakistan (Zia & Bari 1999:40). This took women's quota in National Assembly to 4.1%. Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's party gained majority seats in West Pakistan. Before any session of the Assembly held, the province of East

Pakistan seceded as Bangladesh. Therefore, Bhutto became the President of Pakistan. Bhutto's mass mobilization had no impact to increase women's participation in political forums. Only six women on reserved seats were elected but none on general seats (Shirkat Gah, 2009). For the first time a woman rose to the rank of Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly (from 11-08-1973 to 11-01-1977) (The Commission on the Status of Women 1986).

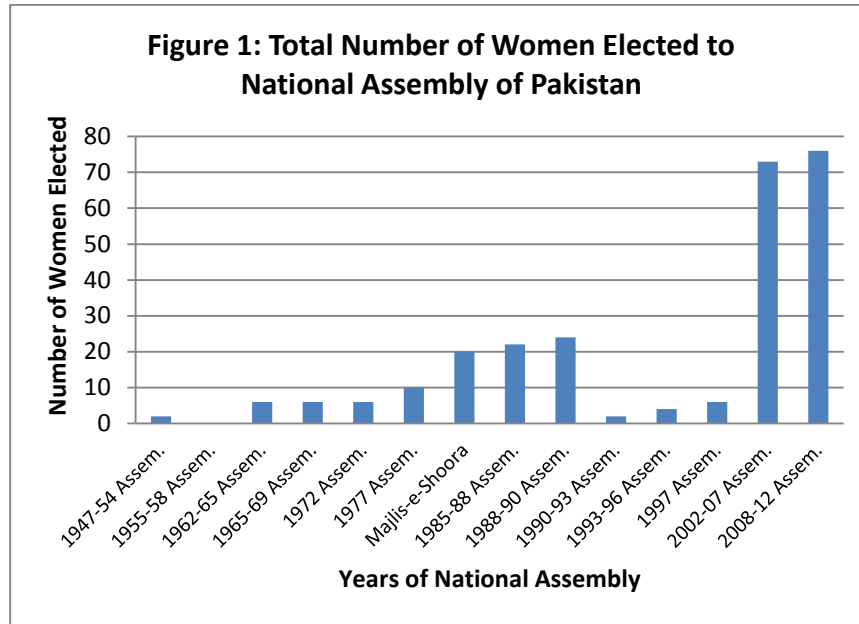
The new Constitution of 1973 adopted a bicameral system defining the parliament as comprising of two houses; Senate as the upper house and National Assembly as the lower house. Under the Article 51(4), the Constitution reserved 5% (10 seats out of total 210 seats) quota for women in National Assembly (Shirkat Gah, 2009). It also prescribed the validity period for this quota reservation for the next ten years or the holding of second general elections of National Assembly, whichever occurs later. The mode of election for women's reserved seats remained indirect. The elections under 1973 Constitution were held in 1977. Besides 10 reserved seats, only one woman, Begum Nasim Wali, contested and won on general seat (Mumtaz, 1998:358). This was the first time ever women got tickets from political parties (Zia and Bari 1999:37). But she never assumed office because of her party's boycott of the assemblies accusing Bhutto for massive rigging in election in 1977 polls. From March 1977 to July 1977, the total strength of women in the house remained 10 members on reserved seats.

The political crisis resulted in third martial law imposed by General Zia-ul-Haq, who held the office; first as Martial Law Administrator and then as President, for more than ten years (1977-1988). Zia nominated a *Majlis-e-Shoora* (Federal Advisory Council) including 20 women members in 1981 (Shirkat Gah, 2009). Later, the 1973 Constitution was revived with numerous changes in 1985. The number of seats reserved for women in National Assembly was doubled and their validity was extended for one more term. The Constitution reserved 8.4% (i.e. 20 seats out of 237) quota for women in National Assembly until the third general elections to the National Assembly is held.

The 1985 elections were held on non-party basis. Besides the 20 reserved seats only one woman, Syeda Abida Hussain, who belonged to very politically influential and landlord family, was successful on general seat from Jhang (Shirkat Gah, 2009; Zia & Bari 1999). In the

by-elections of May 1985, another woman, Nasim A. Majid from Bhawalnagar won a seat in the National Assembly (Shaheed *et.al.*, 1998:10; The Commission on the Status of Women 1986). In this way the total strength of women in house reached to 22 women members (Shirkat Gah, 2009). One of the women was appointed as minister of State. After the death of General Zia, the 1988 elections were held with the same quota reservation (8.4% in National Assembly and non in Senate). Beside 20 reserved seats, four women were elected on general seats (three of them from PPP including prime minister Benazir Bhutto, her mother Nusrat Bhutto, and Dr. Ashraf Abbasi and one, Syeda Abida Hussain, as independent candidate) bringing total strength of women in National Assembly to 24 members (Shirkat Gah, 2009; Zia & Bari, 1999). Benazir Bhutto became the first woman and the youngest prime minister of Pakistan. Other women also became deputy speaker and full ministers. Soon the Assembly was dissolved on the basis of charges of corruption and nepotism.

The Constitutional quota for reserved seats for women expired after 1988 elections. Therefore, next three elections (in 1990, 1993, and 1997) were held without any quota reservation for women. In 1990 elections, only two women (Benazir Bhutto and Nusrat Bhutto) won general seats in National Assembly, as Pakistan Peoples' Party did not issue ticket to any other women (Shirkat Gah 2009; Zia & Bari 1999). This was Nawaz Sharif's first government as prime minister and Benazir Bhutto became the leader of opposition in the assembly. In 1993 elections, only four women, again including three women from PPP (including the two Bhutto ladies and Shenaz Javeed) and one, Tehmina Daultana, from PML (N) won National Assembly seats (Shirkat Gah 2009; Zia and Bari, 1999). Benazir Bhutto second time became the Prime Minister of Pakistan. In 1997 elections, a highest number of women got directly elected on general seats of the National Assembly. The total of six women members of the National Assembly took oath of office. Three of them belonged to Pakistan Peoples' Party and the other three came from Pakistan Muslim League (N). Despite the highest ever strength till then, they actually constituted less than 3 percent of the total strength of National Assembly as 217 directly elected members on general seat (Muslim) (Shaheed *et al.*, 1998: 72). Therefore, after 1997 election, in Sharif's second government women's representation was 2.7% (i.e. 6 out of 217) in the National Assembly.



In 1999, Pakistan again experienced a military takeover by General Pervez Musharraf. The military regime showed its commitment to women's issues as a part of an effort to legitimize its rule. It provided for reservation of enhanced Constitutional quotas for women in National Assembly. The enhanced quota for women introduced in the year 2002 included 17% seats in National Assembly. It came to 60 seats out of total 342 seats in the house. The measure to enhance quota reservation certainly enlarged women's prospects to participate in state political decision making.

The elections held in 2002 brought change in the level of women's participation in National Assembly of Pakistan, as visible in the graphs presented in figure 1 and figure 2. The number of seats reserved for women and thus, the number of women present in the house rose to a never precedent level. Along with an increased number of women elected on general seats, there was also highest number of women won general seats in the house. Besides the seventeen percent (i.e. 60 seats out 342) reserved seats, twelve women got elected on general seats. One woman occupied a seat reserved for minority. The total strength of women members reached to 73 in the house (Shirkat Gah, 2009). In this way, women

representation suddenly jumped to 21.3% (i.e. 73 seats out of total 342 seats) in National Assembly.

The elections in 2008 have showed more improvement with almost 22% women representation in National Assembly; sixty women got elected on reserved seats along with sixteen women winning election on general seats (Shirkat Gah, 2009). In this way, the total number of women reached to 76 members in National Assembly. In short, women's representation in National Assembly of Pakistan gradually progressed from only 2% in 1997 to 22% in 2008. The journey was slow and gradual till it took a speedy move in the year 2002. The enhanced and quick induction of women in the house owes much to the enhanced political quotas introduced for women in the year 2000.

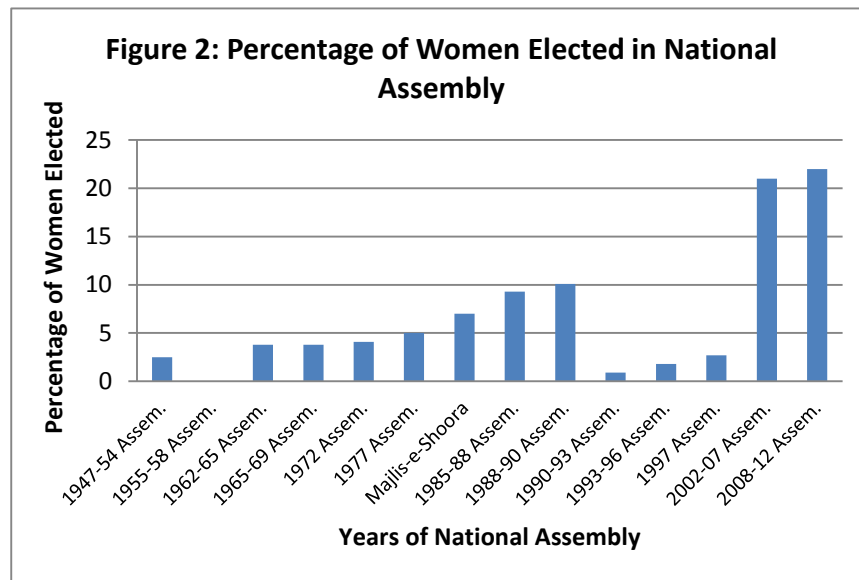
PATTERNS OF WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF PAKISTAN

The analysis of above historical record on women's representation in National Assembly of Pakistan shows some major trends regarding their overall presence, election on different seats and the mode of elections. The trends emerging from the data are as follows: 1) there was a marginal representation of women in the house for long period of history, 2) quota reservation for women remains crucial for their presence in the house, 3) the number of women in house increased as the quota reservation increased, 4) the large number of women ever present in house were elected on reserved seats, 5) very few women could ever win on general seats, 6) only one woman could ever get elected on minority seats till 2008; 7) The mode of election on women's reserved seats always remained indirect.

Marginal Representation of Women in National Assembly:

Women were present in each National Assembly held in Pakistan throughout history, except the one (i.e. second constituent assembly) held during 1955 to 1958. But it is evident that women's overall presence in the house was marginal for the long period of political history of Pakistan (from 1947 to 2000). The graph presented in Figure 2 shows that women's presence was less than 5% from 1947 to 1977. While they were completely absent from the house during 1955 to 1958. Women membership of the assembly gradually progressed and rose to 10% by 1988 elections. But the next three elections from

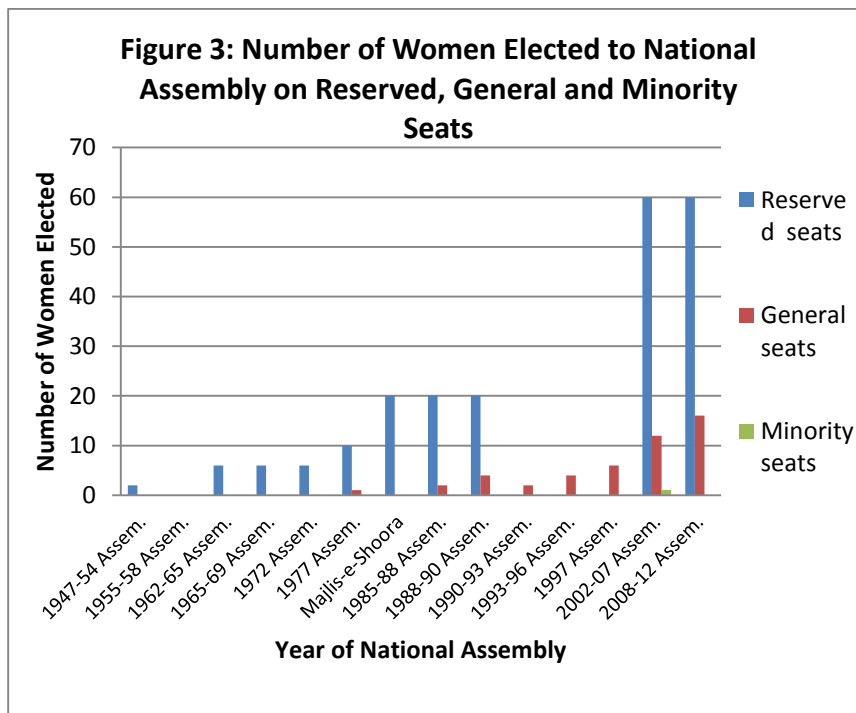
1990 to 2000 again experienced very low level of women's representation (i.e. between 0.9% in 1990 to 2.7% in 1997) due to laps of women's quota reservation. In short, women's representation in the National Assembly could not rise to more than 10% of the total strength of the house during 1947 to 2000. It could only get enhanced by the Constitutional amendments done in the year 2000 to increase the number of women's reserved seats in the house. Despite these enhanced quota reservations, women's presence in the house could never rose to more than 22% of the total strength. Even when it reached to its highest (i.e. 22%) in the year 2008, it was still less than one fourth of the assembly's total strength.



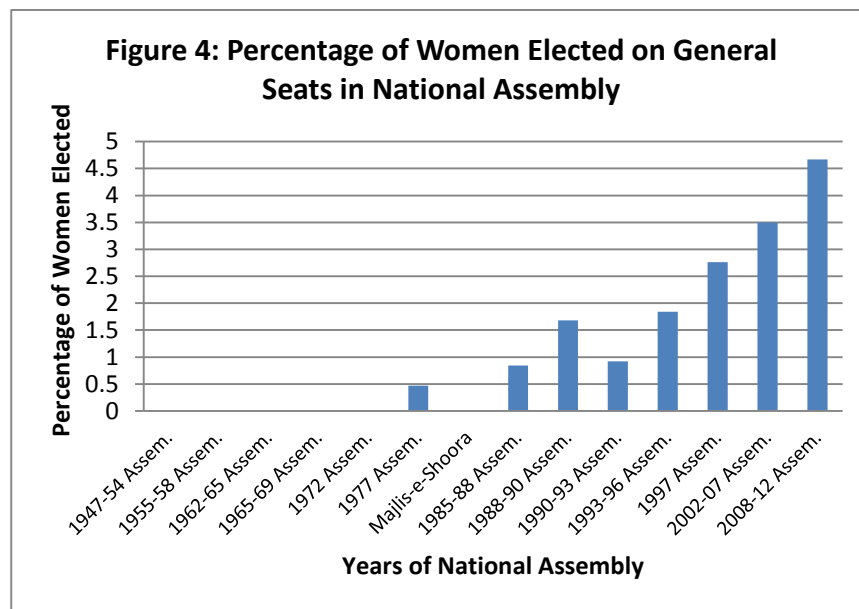
Quota Reservations and Women's Representation in National Assembly: The socio-cultural context of the country is not favorable to enable common women for contestation and election to National Assembly independently. Therefore, the Constitutional quota reservation for women in National Assembly has been proved as a crucial deterring factor for women's absence or level of presence in the house. The women members of the assembly were mostly present in the house on reserved seats. It is evident, from the graphs presented in Figure-1 and Figure-2, that the National Assembly's held in the periods with no defined Constitutional provisions for women's

reserved seats in the house are likely to experience either the absence or a very negligible presence of women members. The second constituent assembly of 1955 to 1958 and the three assemblies held during 1990 to 2000 were elected without any Constitutional provisions of quota for women and consequently witnessed either complete absence or a nominal number of women sitting in house. There was no women representative in the house during 1955 to 1958.

Trends of Women's Election on Reserved, General and Minority Seats: There is a visible pattern of women's election on reserved, general and minority seats. First, the number of reserved seats and women members' presence in the house were found linked to each other. Women were mostly present on reserved seats. To large part, the presence of a sufficient number of women in the house owes to the quota reserved for them. Their number in the house increased only when the quota reservation was enhanced. It is the enhanced quota introduced in the year 2002 that finally led to sufficiently increase in the number of women reaching the house.



Second, till the year 1977 none of the women could win on a general seat (see Figure-3). Even till 1985 no women winning a general seat could be a part of the National Assembly. It was for the first time in 1985 when two women elected on general seats took oath and participated in the house. The number of women winning general seats was low but it slowly progressed and rise to 16 women elected on general seats in the year 2008. The total number of women elected on general seats in the National Assembly was nominal. It can never rise more than the 5% of the total strength of the house (see Figure-4). Third, the chances of women's election on minority appear rare (see Figure-3). During 1947 to 2012, only once a woman was elected on minority seats (i.e. in the National Assembly held in the year 2002).



Mode of Election for Women's Reserved Seats: The number of women present in the house largely depends on the number of seats reserved for women because the women could win a very few general seats. Therefore, the mode of election on reserved seats also became crucial for deciding who will be elected to the house. The mode of election for women on reserved seats always remained indirect. Only the first Constitution promulgated in 1956 defined a direct mode of

election for women on reserved seats. But the Constitution was abrogated without any elections held under the prescribed provisions. Later on, all the Constitution s and military legislations for establishing National Assembly's defined the indirect mode of election for women on reserved seats through the vote of elected assembly members on general seats. Thus no women was able to participate in the National Assembly on reserved seat if she does not have a back from male, landlord, and elite dominated elected assembly members.

CONCLUSION

Since independence of the country, a very few women were able to get elected in the National Assembly of Pakistan. Women's representation remained marginal till the year 2000, except in second Constituent Assembly when there was no women present in the house at all. Irrespective of the military or democratic governments, there was lack of concern to give women an equal share in decision making forums. All the Constitution s reserved women's seats in the assembly. But the number of seats reserved for women was very low. Still, whatever the number of women could be elected to the National Assembly, mostly sat on reserved seats. They could manage to reach these forums due to available quota reserved for women. Only few women could win general seats in the house. The few women on general seats managed women's presence in the house during the period (i.e. 1990-1999) when there was no quota provision at all. The marginal representation of women in National Assembly increased when the enhanced quota reservation of 17% was introduced in the year 2002. A substantial number of women were elected to National Assembly in next two elections held in 2002 and 2008 owing to this enhanced quota allocation. Simultaneously, the highest number of women was also elected on general seats in these elections. In short, the reserved seats for women in the National Assembly played a crucial role for women's presence in the house. The mode of election also remained a crucial factor in shaping women's participation in political forums. The mode of election for women on the reserved seats was always indirect in Pakistan. The indirect mode of election ensured the election of women whom the male dominated assembly chose to bring there.

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