

THE PARTICIPATION AND CONTRIBUTION OF WOMEN IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT SYSTEM IN PAKISTAN: A CASE STUDY OF LARKANA DISTRICT

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Abstract

The participation of women in politics keeps immense importance in a democratic state. The process of democracy can never be imagined without women's participation as being the citizens of the state, they are equally responsible for it. Presently women constitute 48% of the total population of Pakistan. Their role in the politics and national development is highly required and recommended. Local government is the third tier of government which plays a key role to maintain good governance in the society. It is quite imperative for sustaining democracy to provide equal access and full participation to both men and women on the same footings in all areas of life in the society, particularly in decision making position. The first Local Government System in Pakistan was introduced by General Ayub Khan in 1959, in which women were deprived of any participation in the government and were kept away from the politics. Hence they could not play their part in the politics. After Ayub regime although the Local Government Act 1972 was promulgated by the government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, but it remained inactive and there were no elections held and no representation given to the women. Women's participation remained nominal in the local government of

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General Zia. After his long rule, Benazir Bhutto (1988 -90 & 1993-96) and Nawaz Sharif (1990- 93 & 1997- 99) took two tenures, each as the Prime minister of Pakistan but the Local government system could not work satisfactorily. The government of General Pervez Musharraf awarded 33% participation to the women in the Local Government system that was a generous step taken for the first time in the history of Pakistan. It brought certainly a positive change in the society as the role of women for the development of the nation cannot be overridden completely. The objective of this paper is to analyze the participation and contribution of women in the Local Government System in the district of Larkana.

Key words: *Women, Local government, Democracy, Participation, Development, Larkana, Pakistan, National Development, Positive Change, and Society.*

Introduction

Almost half of the world's population is covered by the women folk, who ought to have equal rights to live and utilize all the resources of it as the men do. In Pakistan women constitute 48% population of the state but it is highly agonizing to know that Pakistani women suffer from a lot of discriminations and are deprived of even basic rights and amenities of life. Nearly 2/3 of the adult population cannot read and write and half of the population does not have easy access to the basic social services.

The fundamental rights conferred by the constitution of the state of Pakistan are even violated by its machinery.

“There shall be no discrimination on the basis of sex alone.”

(Constitution of Pakistan, 1973, Article 25)

The right to get education, the right to marry of the choice and the right to be protected seem far away to be acquired by the women of Pakistan. They are treated as the second citizens of the country. The developing country like Pakistan cannot afford to neglect the role of women folk in its development. The government has to formulate such policies where women participation must be made compulsory in every walk of life to accelerate the pace of development. Its

highly alarming situation that half of the population's potential is just wasted due to apathy of few heads hence the pace of development is hampered resulting into weakening economy and development of the country.

The progress and development cannot be possible if all the citizens are not treated equally in the state. It can never be achieved if the rule of law does not persist in the society. Both of the citizens whether men or women should be equally provided with the chances to get education, to have basic health facilities and to be provided with participation in decision making in all national issues. The father of nation Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah realizing the importance of women representation in national development said in a speech in 1944,

“No nation can rise to the height of glory unless your women are Side by side with you; we are victims of evil customs. It is a crime Against humanity that our women are shut up with in the four walls Of the houses as prisoners. There is no sanction anywhere for the Deplorable condition in which our women have to live.” (Zia, 2010.p.78)

The situation may certainly be compared with the developed countries where women are encouraged to participate into the national development. The men folk do not keep biased attitude and women's talent is valued properly. There is no discrimination in the role played by both citizens. The rights and duties are equally distributed amongst them. Gender seems to be no issue in performing their task for the development of the state hence the society is free of the menace of gender disparity and carries on its happy journey towards the development more effectively day by day.

In Pakistan, the first Local Government System introduced by General Ayub Khan, women were even deprived of any participation in the government. Afterwards in the following Local Government Ordinances / Systems awarded the reserved seats to the women that brought certainly a positive change in the society as the role of women for the development of the nation cannot be overridden completely.

Women Participation in Local Government

The Local Government can be defined as “a public organization authorized to decide and administer a limited range of public policies with in a small territory which is a subdivision of a regional or national government” (Haq,1999. p. 15-16).After the creation of Pakistan the local government system was introduced by General Ayub Khan under the banner of Basic Democracies in which women

were denied any participation in the government. Later on the successor governments awarded the nominal representation that could not bear the fruitful results. The Article 32 of the constitution of 1973 clearly declares that;

“The State shall encourage Local Government institutions composed of elected representatives of the areas concerned and in such institutions special representation will be given to peasants, workers and women".(Constitution of Pakistan 1973, Article 32)

So far in the local government system it was the government of General Parvez Musharraf who had allocated 33% seats to the women. The all other governments either did not award any participation or gave the minimal participation to the women. The women were given participation in the local government system accordingly:

Women Representation in Local Government System

Time Period	Regime	Representation
1958-1968	Ayub Khan	No special representation under Basic Democracies Ordinance.
1971-1977	Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto	No special representation was provided.
1977-1985	Zia-ul-Huq	2 seats at UC and 10 percent for other tiers except NWFP.
1988-1990	Benazir Bhutto	Local government elections were not held.
1990-1993	Nawaz Sharif	10.4 percent
1994-1996	Benazir Bhutto	Local government elections were not held.
1997-1999	Nawaz Sharif	12.7% in Punjab, 25.8% in Balochistan, 2.9% in NWFP and 23% in Sindh.

Source: Adapted from Aurat Publication and Information Services Foundation, 2001.

In the regime of Parvez Musharraf (1999-2008) 33% representation was awarded to women at all levels.

After the general elections of 2008, Pakistan Peoples' Party came into power and Syed Yousaf Raza Geelani was given the responsibility to be the Prime Minister of Pakistan. The PPP completed its tenure of five complete years from 2008 up to

2013 but no elections of Local bodies were held nor any legislation done in that context.

In the general elections of 2013 Nawaz Sharif became the Prime minister of the country who took some initiatives to install the local government system in the country again. The provinces were directed to legislate upon it and hold the elections accordingly. The women make half of the total population of the country therefore considering their amount of the population they should be given equal participation in the local government system so as to get better results of their representation. The women have been given inadequate and unequal representation in the local government system. There are many wrong assumptions and notions regarding the women folk in the society. The general assumption is that the political activities belong to the public sphere and women by nature belong to the private sphere so the politics does not suit to their delicate nature and it is assumed by the men folk that women should stay at home and look after the household chores and rearing children only. The women cannot play their role in the political affairs as they do not possess political insight and strength of ideas that is strongly required in the field of politics. They cannot sustain the pressure to work and are feeble in decision making at the times of crises. Hence they should remain within the four walls of boundaries and should not take part in the political activities. Despite the situation the women have been working shoulder to shoulder with the men and have proved to be useful citizens of the state.

The women of Larkana have also been contributing their due role to the politics of the region for the development of the country. Begum Nusrat Bhutto, Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto, Begum Attiq-u-Zaman, Begum Ashraf Abbasi, Dr. Hameeda Khuhro, Dr. Sabeeha Arshad Mughal, Fatima Abdul Razaq Soomro, Mehtab Akbar Rashdi, Touqeer Fatima Bhutto, Advocate Kalpna Devi and Dr. Prih Sakeena Gaad are some of the prominent women who served with their heart and soul and their services and role played for the Larkanians can never be neglected by the people of Larkana. There are a number of young and energetic women who are trying to render their services for the development of the city and particularly for the womenfolk of Larkana.

Larkana district comprises of four sub districts or Talkas; Larkana, Ratodero, Bakrani and Dokri. To analyze the impact of the contribution and participation of the women of Larkana district in the Local government system the women politicians / councilors were interviewed. Their job responsibilities and role played as councilors in their respective areas was analyzed and a survey was also

conducted to evaluate their role as the councilors in the district. The results of it are not satisfactory for the local government could not deliver well in this district due to various reasons. Albeit the public complained regarding the poor performance of Local government, however the positive views were found about the women participation in the Local government. The people appreciated and encouraged the participation of women in the local government system and ensured their full support to the office bearers. The women showed more interest in the women representation in the Local government. They think that the women issues can be best addressed by the women representatives who are also the part of the same society where the issues persist on. The women councilors have better understanding and knowledge of women issues and their psyche, therefore their representation is a must in the Local government system for a healthy society and sustainable democracy. Being the half of the population of the state the women should be given equal part in every process of decision making. When the overall performance of women in the local government system was evaluated in the Larkana district, the following facts were known:

All the councilors had their party support during the election campaign whereas the elections were conducted on non-party basis. Some of the councilors in the district were found completely uneducated who never attended the school so the role of such illiterate councilors was just like a puppet councilors who could guard their party interest and were least bothered about the public interest. The uneducated women councilors cannot play their part well because they remain unaware of their rights and responsibilities. A very few of them knew about the Local Government System before they got elected while many did not have any idea about the system of Local Government and they just followed the instructions of either their counterparts or the Nazim of their Union Council. Besides they were not provided with a personal copy of the Local Government Ordinance. Some of the women councilors gave priority to women issues and worked accordingly while some of them focused on general issues of their respective union councils. Some of them complained that they could not work due to lack of funds and negligible behavior of the male councilors and Nazim of their councils. Most of the women councilors worked for the education, health and employment of the women of their union councils so as to make them self-dependent. They also worked for the general welfare of the women of their localities. Some of the councilors were satisfied with their participation in the meetings because their views were welcomed and taken positively while others were dissatisfied because their views were usually overridden and their opinion was not made the part of final decision. All the councilors were unhappy with their nominal participation in the district government. The women councilors

complained that they were not granted any travelling and daily allowance to attend the meetings so they spent from their own purse. Most of the women councilors were happy to receive the equal status as of men councilors and told their status as a counselor was not recognized well in the society. Many of them complained that the call for meeting and its agenda were not intimated properly by the Nazim so they attended the meeting without any preparation. The uneducated women councilors agreed that their opinion was not given much importance in comparison of the well educated women councilors. Some of the even believed that they were neglected as being the women while male councilors were given more importance in every matter. Some of the women councilors experienced that more schemes made by male councilors were approved in contrast to women councilors' schemes. They complained that the approval of more male schemes shows the biased attitude of the male colleagues to the women councilors. Many of them told that no funds were allotted to them properly so they could not carry out their schemes well and that spoilt their image of efficiency in the society. They also complained that due to lack of technical training their schemes were rejected. There were no offices allotted to the women councilors. The unavailability of offices to the women councilors proved to bring a wide gap in communication amongst the councilors. The coordination became difficult due to no provision of offices. The lack of coordination and proper communication between men and women councilors affected upon the smooth working of their union council. There were no specific facilities provided to the lady councilors during their tenure in the Local Government. All the union councilors told that they did not use the funds independently. The councilors even did not know the exact budget figure allotted to their union councils. They told that the funds were utilized by the Nazim himself. No any women councilor had the role in preparation of budget. They were completely ignored in the budget making. All the women councilors appreciated the behavior of their male counterparts. They told that the behavior was supportive and encouraging to the lady councilors. All the women councilors mostly worked for the welfare and empowerment of women, although they were not made free to work. They were restrained to work through certain ways such as no funding or little funding and no proper guidance and facilities. The women councilors claimed that if they were provided with all required facilities, they could be very much helpful for the poor and needy women of their respective areas. Many of the women councilors complained that their party office bearers had a lot of intervene in their working of Local government system. They got the share of funds from the Nazim, resultantly; the Nazim could not distribute the proper funds to the councilors. This bore the Local Government System no success and ultimately the common people had no good impression of the Local Government system. All the lady councilors

showed their full determination to work better than before, if they get elected in the next Local government elections. They want to work for the poor, compelled and downtrodden women of their area. They determine to provide them such opportunities so as they may become self –dependent and they should not be the burden upon their male relatives and should prove to be good and helpful citizens of the state. The lady councilors believe that the education can be the best support rather weapon of the women. The women councilors also demand the technical education for the women. They said that the technical education would prove to be highly supportive for the women particularly for those who are uneducated. The women councilors showed their full enthusiasm for the next tenure. They were eager to work for their folk. They were determined to give relief to the poor women of their locality by providing them support. The morale of all the women councilors is high.

Conclusion

After evaluating the overall performance of the women councilors of Larkana district, the outcome of the paper is summed up as follows:

The women councilors of Larkana district, particularly the well educated women councilors have played very much positive role in the uplifting of women folk of their union council. They took great efforts to bring the change in the women's life by providing them opportunities of getting education, making them self-dependent and providing them the source of income by distributing among them sewing machines. The establishment of vocational centers by the lady councilors in their respective areas also made the destitute women empowered and self-dependent for the purpose so as they may not be taken as burden by their male relatives. The lady councilors also took efforts to provide the basic health facilities to the women of their localities. The dispensaries were opened to alleviate the suffering women. The women councilors took keen interest to address the women issues and involved themselves personally to redress the sufferings of poor women. The lady councilors to some extent succeeded in their aim but they also faced many hindrances and difficulties which hampered their performance and they could not acquire the desired results. The women councilors, who themselves were uneducated could not play their due part because they either did not know well about their role and status or were ignored on the basis of their illiteracy. They even did not know about the Local government system properly. To many of them the Local Government system was a new. Due to their lack of knowledge about the Local Government system they remained confused and inactive till the end of their tenure. They could not deliver what they were expected to do to the society. The ignorance of the lady councilors

made them inactive and shy as well. They could not learn well about the system and even hesitated to learn about it. Yet they showed their full concern for the womenfolk and were determined to work for the women of their area if they would be given another chance in the future.

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