

## **Socio-Political Cultural Impedes of Women Participation in Politics of Balochistan:**

By

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### **Abstract:**

*Women equality with men is almost necessary in all aspect of life. But the current scenario of policies has witnesses that a woman does not get equal opportunities like men to participate in political affairs. The objective of this scholarly study was to identify bottlenecks in the women's engagement in politics. The study was qualitative model using descriptive model. The independent variables of social institutions, political entities and religion were tested against data to understand their effect on the dependent variable of political empowerment of women and identify challenges. For data collection semi structure interviews were utilized and participants were selected on the basis of snow ball sampling. The scope of the study is limited to Balochistan; therefore, the participant included female political workers, current and former legislature from Balochistan. The Data was organized and codified manually by author and was analyzed using thematic analysis. The results depict that women's political empowerment in province remains an unfulfilled dream by the virtue of barriers such as inadequate legislation, patriarchal values in society, religious entities, political parties. The legislation is an important and effective tool to empower females politically.*

**Keywords:** Patriarchy- Barriers- Legislation- women Empowerment- Religious Entities Political parties- Social, Political and Economic Institutions.

### **Introduction:**

Discrimination remains one of the major social evils faced by many around the world; victims of it include specific individuals or groups being

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persecuted based on their religious beliefs, gender, color, ethnicity, and numerous reasons. (“Discrimination: What it is, and How to Cope,” 2019) Among these persecuted, women are one of the largest groups victimized due to their gender. They face a wide range of discriminative acts, most importantly denial of political rights, right to vote, and right to participate in political activities (“Misogyny,” 2020). This denial of political rights hinders to uplift their status in any society. Such practices have diminished from the developed world yet continue to be observed in backward societies, especially third world countries. (Amnesty International, n.d.) The case of women in Pakistan, especially in Balochistan is not different from the women from other least developed regions of the world. (Umer, Othman, & Hassan, 2016)

### **Literature Review:**

A study by Bari, (2005) identified ideology, political reasons, socio-cultural and economic reasons that impede women’s engagement in politics. She further states that limited resources and no clear plan of action are also bottlenecks. Furthermore, since 2002 and ahead, Parliament has seen an increase in female legislators, which positively impacted women’s empowerment. Nonetheless, the real dream of women’s empowerment has not been achieved yet. (Bano, 2009)

To trace the historical struggle of females in Pakistan's politics, Shami (2009), before the Musharraf era, women had been active in politics except for Zia’s era. He believes that Musharraf took steps which allowed space for women to participate at all levels of politics. Kalam, (2014) believes that limitations on women in the name of security adversely influence their ability to take part as voter and candidate. This effect is due to insufficient movement and being kept in homes. A similar view is held by Peterson, (2008) that the women of Balochistan suffer more as compared to rest of Pakistan as their movement is restricted to homes only.

According to Naz, (2011), the insufficient movement of women in Balochistan is due to closely adhering to prevailing traditions and norms in the society. The result of this is weak empowerment of women vis a vis politics. Balochistan’s patriarchal society is the product of absence of political awareness and low literacy rate among women. (Peterson, 2008)

The domestic obligations limit time for politics and socialization for politics, limited resources, patriarchal structures of political parties, insufficient number of women follow careers that can lead to political leadership and lack of ability to circumnavigate the obstacles in electoral process impede women from taking part in politics. (Randall, 1987) (Matland & Taylor, 1997) (Rule, 1981). Oduol (2008) believes that many women are unable to take leadership roles as their education level is

low or they have no access to quality education. The association of leadership with male attributes is and will continue to limit women for engagement in politics as long as it exists.(Kellerman & Rhode, 2007) (Kiamba, 2008)

Women's success in politics is influenced by how society perceives them. The impact of it can be observed when a party selects a candidate, people vote for a candidate and women themselves decision to join politics (Paxton, Kunovich, & Hughes, 2007). Besides, violence's at home, society and by state depict a form of patriarchy which is an obstacle for women to participate in politics McCarthy and Sultana, (2004) . National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW, 2010) report identifies that despite given representation females inactivity in politics is due to the established patriarchy and culture in different institutions.

### **Rationale of the Study:**

The current study aims to explore obstacles in women's participation in politics. The existing research has addressed this question either separately. Besides, existing studies have been too wide in scope, covering whole country or quite limited in scope. This study will explore the challenges faced by women in politics at multi-level and across the whole Balochistan, including all ethnic groups Balochs, Hazaras, Pashtuns and others. This broad scope of the current study will address the question of geography as well. Also, the study will provide knowledge about the difference of attitude between nationalist and non-nationalist parties as province politics has strong influence of nationalist and ethnicity-based parties.

### **Social Institutions as a Barrier for Women's Participation in Politics:**

Jamila Baloch, a member of Central Committee Balochistan National Party (Mengal) (personal communication, August 30, 2020), identifies that the primary challenge to any women is his family as they are the most closest to her. The acceptance and motivation from family enables a female to think about joining politics. Also, the family defines women's role thus being a source of discrimination. Fozia Baloch, a member of Central Committee Balochistan National Party (Mengal), (personal communication, September10, 2020) believes many women cannot distinguish between their rights and duties as at family level they are fed with orthodox ideas that women's place is inside home which they voluntarily accept it. This issue needs to be addressed through awareness.

Further, the society has certain groups which discourage female political activists from raising their voice for rights associated with social and political welfare. The discouragement comes in the form of criticism from male's particularly (Jamila Baloch, personal communication, August 30,

2020). Jalila Haider, a women rights activist, (personal communication, July 15, 2020) sums up it as, in Balochistan; the acceptance of women in political sphere is limited on the notion that this role is not suitable for them.

Another reason for that is the class system in the province. The women are only entitled to reach or continue their political activities if they are from an elite family. On the other hand, a middle or lower class women is allowed when an elite class male cannot pursue a certain task or contest for a public office (Fozia, 2020). Hameeda Noor, a social activist, (personal communication, July 25, 2020) is of the opinion that the class system has created status quo and at the top of this are tribal elites in the province which are not willing to accept or allow women from other than their class to be part of politics in the province. Khalida Qazi, Provincial President of Women Democratic Federation, (personal communication, July 3, 2020) believes that tribalism has profound effect on women's participation in politics; it denies them the space out of their homes which denies their access to politics. This effect of this can be seen outside home as society of the province is not affable towards women who are part of politics and the reason is that it challenges patriarchal status quo. Tabbasum Nadir, member of organizing committee of National Democratic Party, (personal communication, August 18, 2020), acknowledges that tribalism is an obstacle for women on the road to politics as society believes it is against their values that women should engage in activities outside their homes, yet she is optimistic and believes that the change is in process. According to Hameeda Hazara, a political and social activist, (personal communication, August 5, 2020), tribal fault lines limit women's choices when it comes to joining political parties in the province especially in the case of nationalist parties. It comes in two forms first nationalist parties do not endorse female candidates from other ethnic groups and second their host communities restrict their support if a women joins a nationalist party other than her ethnic group or community. In Jamila Baloch's (2020) opinion the cultural values and norms are not a threat to female's engagement in politics as long as she obliges them. Another perception that women are weak is exploited by patriarchal mindset and the reason for it is to make her dependent on male. However, there are many examples which debunk this false claim (Hameeda Noor, 2020).

### **Religious Misinterpretation a Source of Hindrance:**

Beside social bottlenecks religion is considered one of impediments for women's political participation. According to Jamila Baloch (2020) it is not the religion itself rather the clergy and religious parties leadership that objects on females' participation in politics. Shakila Naveed Dehwar, a central committee member of BNP M (personal communication,

September 18, 2020), believes that due to tribalism religion does not have any profound effect on women's being part of politics and it is evident from many examples across the country inclusive of Balochistan. Another belief is that religion is not a barrier for women's participation in politics. Khalida Qazi (2020), seconds that.

In contrast to early days of Islam when women were active in social, political and economic activities now clergy is touting the distorted version of Islam, adulterer by adding patriarchal values. This inexact version of Islam is used as tool to deprive women from their due political rights which includes prohibition from political participation (Fozia, 2020). Tabbasum (2020) concedes to that and believes that families restrict women from taking part in politics as they consider it violates the Islamic laws. A similar opinion is shared by Hameeda Noor (2020), yet she cites that a particular class opposes women's participation in politics. Besides, she believes that the tribal system is not influenced by religion in the province and society is liberal as far as women's taking part in political activities. Hameeda Hazara (2020) identifies that particular class as clergy which through misinterpretation of religion tries to keep women out of politics.

#### **Lack of Conducive Political Atmosphere:**

The reserve seats are discouraging for women as the political parties are dominated by male. Thus, women political members of different legislatures become dependent on men in power for funding (Jamila, 2020). Similar views are shared by Jalila Haider (2020), a renowned female political activist. She is of the opinion that women lawmakers are forced to project party interests rather than doing anything for welfare of women. Besides, these women's decisions are guided by their male patrons. Also, out of necessity political parties male structure promotes women but not for the sake of women's participation in politics. The reason for that is to main status quo and receives funds. Another reason for that is the political parties are dynastic or under the control of certain cult who promote a certain group of females, it can only be addressed through democratization of political parties can ensure women's political rights (Fozia, 2020). In addition, the women selected on reserved seats are neither heard nor supported by their parties because being male dominated the acceptance is still a distant dream. Therefore, women legislatures are not as effective as male legislatures which disappoint their female supporters. Also, male members and bureaucracy creates hurdles in the execution of their projects and performing duties (Shakeela, 2020). Hameeda Hazara (2020) shares a similar view and they lack power by citing the example of female legislature who was forced to leave provincial assembly session when her baby cried and absence of daycare for female legislature's children. Fozia (2020) also adds that there is

perception among women political workers that their role is limited to reserved seats and sometimes lacks the courage to contest on general seats. Therefore, women political workers do not challenge the status quo. There is no doubt that reserved make dependent on women yet the positive side of this is that reserved seats gave voice to the women and influence the lawmaking while protecting their rights (Hameeda Noor, 2020).

As compared to past the political parties are now welcoming women and the membership has increased in last decade. For instance, from 3 members to more than 700 female members joined BNP Mengal in last 13 years. One of the issues with political parties of Balochistan is that they lack democratization. However, in recent past it has been observed that BNP M has welcomed female political workers to contest inside party structure on major positions. Similarly, it has allowed women political workers to contest in local government and provincial assembly elections on general seats (Jamila, 2020). In Jalila's (2020) view BAP was the second party beside BNP M to support and promote females in politics. Also Hameeda Noor (2020), seconds this notion that now leadership of political parties in Balochistan are thinking differently and women candidates are being encouraged to contest on general seats. Khalida Qazi (2020), in contrast to above mentioned views claims that the political parties support is symbolic and quotas are meager which lead back to patriarchal society. In comparison to non-nationalist parties, nationalist parties are more welcoming towards females participation in politics which is clear at all levels of politics (Shakeela, 2020). Tabbasum (2020), believes that political parties in the Balochistan are uncommitted towards women's participation in politics and if any women is selected to a legislative body it is either dynastic or nepotism. And parties have profound gender disparity. Hameeda Hazara's (2020) view are not different to above mentioned ideas, she believes patriarchy is present in all ethnic groups and is reflected by political parties attitude towards female participation in politics. Nationalist parties support is superficial rather than deep or thorough.

Lawmaking has compelled political parties to give fair chance to rise in political arena, nonetheless political parties bypassed it by employing women on seats where they cannot win, and the exploitation continues on (Jalila, 2020). Fozia Baloch (2020), substantiates this claim by adding that women candidates are forced by parties to contest in constituencies which are unfamiliar to them and often end runner up. Hameeda Hazara (2020), supports this by quoting Shazia Langov's example, as she was asked by party to contest in a constituency where her party's presence was absent. Shakila Naveed Dehwar (2020), debunks that claim by presenting her example that she was given ticket by party on general seat where she secured third highest votes. Also she adds that lawmaking has bound political parties to give opportunities to females in electoral process which

is a milestone. In Tabbasum's (2020), view reserved seats are kind of encouragement for females to take part in politics yet the negative side is that they are distributed on party basis. Khalida Qazi (2020), supports this view and states that legislative acts have made a positive impact on women's access to politics and provided them opportunities yet there is need more legislations for women participation in politics and proposes that rather dividing reserved seats on party basis there should be election between women and creation of balance between male and female seats in legislative bodies. The awareness and consciousness are missing from females of the provinces. The result of this phenomena is that the women voters either vote as instructed by their families and do not understand why it is important to vote for a female candidate (Fozia, 2020). Overall, women in province have come a long way when it comes to women's participation in politics but issue has not been fully (Jalila, 2020).

### **Economic Limitations:**

Most of the women in Balochistan are economically dependent on their families and that does not allow them to engage or initiate any political activity (Jamila,2020). The prevailing patriarchy exploits the economic limitations of women of Balochistan created by tribal system of the province and it limits their political participation (Jalila, 2020). Hameeda Noor (2020), explains this as the political activities, in particular contesting election require resources and women are dependent on their families. And families do not consider this important as they are influenced by tribal values. So, women end up with limited or no budget. Many of women's works which mostly include household chores and taking care of family goes unpaid. Thus, their labor remains unpaid and making them dependent on guardian (Jalila,2020).The political parties lack any system to support their female members in fiscal issues to facilitate them in order to be active at ground level (Fozia,2020).

### **Conclusion:**

While assessing society's role in female's political participation, the first and foremost is family. It has been found that family's role is crucial yet it is always negative. Family discourages women through orthodox idea that women's place is inside home, similarly, society and prevailing tribal structure belief that women should keep up its traditional role rather engaging in politics. Tribalism makes an exception if it seems that norms and values are being preserved and followed by female engaged in politics. After that, society is critical about women choosing their role as it challenges the status quo, since it is patriarchal in nature. This criticism comes in the form of violation of culture and norms as well as politics are not suitable for females. Lastly, the class difference has an important role in female's participation in politics, elite class promotes a certain group of females in politics which are either from their class or they serve those

elites. And these elites observe lower- and middle-class women as competitors coming to destroy the prevailing status quo.

It has been observed that religion itself does not limit women from being part of politics. However, the clergy as a class are against the phenomena of women as politicians as it challenges their status quo. For that they propagate distorted version of religion in the society while it was also observed that tribalism acts as a counter force against religion when it comes to women's engagement in politics. This opposition is done through sowing liberal values in the society.

Furthermore, legislation vis-a-vis increasing women's role in politics has borne positive fruits in the shape of increase in the number of women membership of parties, more female legislators, compelling political parties to give tickets women on general seats. Nonetheless, it is still insufficient, as political parties have found ways to bypass those efforts and gender disparity remains inside legislature as well as political parties. Also, the attitude of political parties remains same as they are not willing to accept women as political worker, leader, and legislator. Their support is symbolic. Besides, inside Balochistan party structures lack democratization; they are rigged with nepotism and patriarchy which hinders females from joining politics. However, it has been observed that nationalist parties attract more females as compared to non-nationalist parties in the province. Last but not least, women are still unwilling to challenge the patriarchal status quo which is crucial for their engagement in politics.

Economically women are dependent on their families and party due to patriarchal socio-economic environment. Both of them deny the support to females in politics due to their mindset and interests respectively. Also, lack of legislation and absence of economic aid mechanism for females in political parties complicate women's entry into politics.

### **Suggestions:**

Since abovementioned findings suggest that there is room for more to be done to facilitate women's engagement in politics. Therefore, here are some suggestions recommended by the author. Firstly, it is beyond any doubt that lawmaking has yielded positive results but there are certain gaps. To stop political parties from exploiting the gaps, there should be election on reserve seats for women between women's instead of allocating them to political parties on their strength. After that the women candidates suffer from lack of funding, for those parties should be made accountable to provide resources to their women candidates contesting on general seats. Next, there is need to counter distorted version of Islam prohibiting women from politics. It can be addressed through lawmaking and awareness. Any candidate opposing women's politics should be



reprimanded harshly, their party should face penalty of ban or losing their registration. There is need for legislation to address economic and fiscal issues related with aiding women's political activities through the party support.

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