

Political Empowerment of Women in Pakistan (1947-1988)



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Abstract: *Pakistan is an Islamic country, situated in south Asia having more than 49 percent women population according to last official census. This paper attempts to explore the steps taken by the respective governments from 1947 till 1988 for politically empowering women. The span of the study is divided into two section, pre and post 1971. This year 1971 is taken as bench mark year because it was in this year that Eastern part of the country liberated itself from the rest of the country on the ground of being politically deprived. This study attempts to answer the question that whether this separation resulted in increased political empowerment for female that remained in Pakistan after 1971. This separation was significant for the country as post-1971 now Pakistan had more than 96 percent Muslim population compared to nearly 70 percent in pre-1971. While going through the Assembly debates, promulgated legislations and newspaper clipping this study will reach to its conclusions. This paper while going the political developments in these years attempts to concludes that separation of East Pakistan resulted in overall increase in steps taken towards women political empowerment in Post-1971 Pakistan compared to the Pakistan that was prior to 1971.*

Keywords: *Women empowerment, Political empowerment, Separation of East Pakistan*

Introduction

Political Women Empowerment is a modern concept whereby Women get political authority to rule over the country. Pakistan is a predominantly male dominated country, this paper by going through various government from its nascent years till the country got divided into two independent countries, will attempt to analyze the difference in polity of the country in pre and post 1971 Pakistan. This study is divided into three sections. The first section will discuss the words, “women empowerment” and

“political empowerment”. The next section will discuss the steps taken by various governments from 1947 to 1971. The third section will deal with the steps taken from 1971 onward till 1998 and at end last section in the light of discussions will summarize the findings.

This section discusses the meaning attached with the term women empowerment. This term women empowerment has various definitions. For instance giving someone or group of individual strength and status in a given situation is known as empowerment. United Nation

define the term as “It is the process by which women become aware of gender based unequal power relationship, further they acquire louder voice in which to speak out against the inequality found in society” (UNESWA, 2017). Collin’s dictionary defines the term as: “to grant someone the capacity or ability to act or greater control over one’s life” (Collinsdictionary, 2021). One of the famous sociologist Rowland in order to elaborate the term women empowerment divided it into the further four categories: “Power within”, “power with”, “power to” and “power over” (Rowlands, 1997). Dyson and Moore famous anthropologists explained the term women empowerment as: the capacity to make decision about one’s private concern (Dyson & Moore, 1983). Having seen so diverse meaning attached to this term of women empowerment it can be said that there is no simple definition of woman empowerment because it encompasses so many different concepts. However more or less it can be said that women empowerment is the promotion of women’s ability to make their own decisions and their right to influence political, economic and social change for themselves (Imran & Wei, 2019).

Having reached to the definition of Women Empowerment, it would be pertinent to discuss the types of Women empowerment. For the purpose of this study it will be divided into five different categories: social, educational, economic, psychological, and political. Rest of the areas are beyond the scope of the topic of this study, we will now discuss here only the Women political empowerment.

Political women empowerment means that they must have a voice. Further their say in politics must be considerable in allowing their point of view be pushed into mainstream media and to impact the polity of the country. It is necessary for a society to have Women with a sense of general political consciousness (Imran et al., 2021; Haq et al., 2020). They should work hand in hand with men in practical politics. Their participation in politics entails the delegation of power and authority in the disadvantaged, burdened, and immobilized people. Further that section of society that will not be been capable

to contribute in the policymaking process and the application of program of government (United Nations Development Programme, 2005). Women political empowerment guarantees the full partaking of the women in the democratic system. From this discussion it can be inferred that it not just about their eligibility of getting elected in the Assembly. This process of Women empowerment incorporates their part as voters, as adherents of a political party, and participation in the political process. If Women get their share in all of these sectors then we may say that they are fully empowered. Now having discussed the connotation of women empowerment and the political women empowerment, preceding section of the study will start that will discuss the steps taken by different government from 1947 to 1971.

After the creation of Pakistan in 1947, its first Prime Minister was Mr. Liaquat Ali Khan till 1951. The most noticeable role regarding the empowerment of Women during his government was his support for his wife Begum Ra’ana Liaquat Ali. She was an educated lady born at Agra and studied at the University of Lakhnow in 1929. She can truly be regarded as the first woman to go forth to support national women’s empowerment. She founded “All Pakistan Women Association” (APWA) in 1948. APWA was formed at a time when Muslim women were not allowed to go out of their homes (Imran & Wei, 2019). She tried to open many doors of the future for women empowerment, as under the management of APWA. She laid the foundation of an Employment Bureau for Women. She further established lost and found Bureau for the missing women after migration. In addition to it she inaugurated a marriage bureau, a widow’s home for the poor ladies (Kazimi, 2014). She used women volunteer to provide above said services, and other other services to the women.

Another contribution of Ra’ana Liaquat Ali Khan was to encourage women to take up nursing as a profession, because it was desperate of the nation to have female nurses. Muslims before partition were apprehensive about letting their daughters work as nurses. Ra’ana pursued the Muslims to join this profession. It was because of her appeal that educated families came

forward to join this profession. In this regard, nursing staff was exchanged with the nurses in London, many nurses were sent from Pakistan for getting trained to help the patients and get advanced trainings (Rehman, 2001). Having above discussed attempts by Ra'ana Liaquat, most important try regarding empowering women during his husband's government was an attempt to promulgate a Legislation to protect women's economic rights. This bill was presented in the Legislative Assemble for discussion in 1948 but it was not until 1951 that, Muslim personal laws were promulgated in 195. These laws gave right for women to inherit property that also included agricultural lands (Jamal, 1990). So in a nut shell it can induced that first legal step take regarding the women empowerment was by giving them right of inheritance and property rights.

It was then in 1954 that Muhammad Ali Bogro initiated the process of appointing Woman ambassador of Pakistan. On September 14, 1954 the government of Pakistan declared to start the process of women empowerment by appointing female ambassador. From 1954 to 1966 Raina Liaquat Ali Khan remained the ambassador of Pakistan in Netherland.

Ayub Khan, who was the Martial Law administrator in 1958 and later President of the country till 1969, encouraged women to pursue novel educational opportunities and despised the reactionary element, holding it responsible for the nation's and the people's backwardness. During his tenure, he emphasized the importance of educating women so that they could present themselves to the world. General Ayub khan during his government took several steps for the women empowerment. The promulgation of the "Family Laws" was the first step taken by him. In these family laws he introduced laws to prohibit polygamy.

After the protests of 1969 and the popularity of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in West Pakistan and Sheikh Mujeeb in East Pakistan another Martial Law Administration, General Yahya Khan took over the country. He introduced the Legal Frame Work Order and nothing substantial was in this setup related to the women political empowerment. The power struggle between

East and West wing of the country escalated. In 1971 India also attacked Pakistan on the Eastern front and this resulted in the division of the country in two separate countries.

Next section of this paper explores the steps taken by the Government of Pakistan after separation of East Pakistan then afterwards called Bangladesh. In 1971 Eastern wing of the country got separated from the West on political grounds. This separation was not a peaceful one, as it was the result of war between India and Pakistan. In this war the Indian army was supporting the freedom fighters of East Pakistan that was named as Bangladesh after getting separated from the Pakistan. It would be beyond the limit of this paper to discuss the causes of separation of East Pakistan, however it would be pertinent to discuss here that this separation changed the fate of the people that remained in West Pakistan that would be here after called Islamic Republic of Pakistan (Pakistan), as named by its first indigenous constitution. It was now on the course of *Islamisation* reason being that now it has no reservation from very ignorable minority members in its legislature after 1971. Theoretically Islam provides as much right to women as are to men; however the *ulema* were not ready to give women right to be elected as the President/ruler of the country.

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto initilay became the first Civilian Martial Law administrator. Later he remained President for a short time and signed the 1973 constititon. Finally he became the Prime Minister of the country. "After taking over the power his foremost challenge was to frame the constitution. For this purpose two female mebers, *Begam Nasim Jahan* and *Begam Ashraf Abbasi* were counted in for the framing of new constitution. These women performed the same role as was manifested by Begum Jahan Ara and Begum Shaista during the making of the 1956 Constitution (Mehmood, 1990).

Liberal attitudes toward women characterized Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's democratic administration (1970–1977). Women were given access to all government services that were previously unavailable to them. Women were permissioned to run for general seats without any restrictions in the National Assembly's 10% and provincial

assembly' 5% reserved seats, respectively. The 1973-adopted Pakistani Constitution made gender equality a distinct promise. The constitution clarifies that there shall be no discrimination based only upon gender. Additionally, it promotes participation of women in every aspects of life and provides protection for marriage, families, mothers, and children. (Mumatz & Saheed, 1987).

Any five-year plans before 1971 did not included any distinct section on women until 1971. At this period, women were seen as a socially disadvantaged population in need of assistance from the government. The Pakistan People Party established the government in 1971. The Zulfiqar Bhutto administration promoted liberal views on women. Women were granted equal citizenship rights by the Pakistani Constitution of 1973. There were roughly ten percent reserved seats fixed for women in the National Assembly and five percent in the provincial assemblies.

The constitution of 1973, significantly enhanced women's legal status in the country on multiple ways. It emphasized the state's commitment to outlawing exploitation as its article 25 (1) states that all people have a right to equal treatment in court and protection from the law. (Assembly, 1973) Further article 25 (2) further clarifies that there should be no discrimination on the basis of sex. In addition to the said, the article 27 prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, race, religion, or caste in government employment. (Assembly, 1973) The final paragraph of Article 34 of the Principles of Policy section states that "steps shall be adopted to ensure full involvement of women in all spheres of national life." (Assembly, 1973) Article 38 adds the requirement for the government to "ensure the well-being of the people, irrespective of sex, caste, creed, or race, by increasing their level of life" (a). (Assembly, 1973)

General Zia ul haq toppled the Bhutto government on 5th July 1977, and apparently blocked the empowerment process that was ongoing during the Bhutto government. The present legal standing of women in Pakistan was significantly influenced by Zia ul-military Haq's administration, which lasted from 1977 to 1987.

A number of restrictive and backwards-looking legislation, notably those pertaining to the treatment of women, were promulgated under his government. This was done as an effort to reinforce fictitious boundaries between the public and private worlds. The Pakistani government's earlier dedication to "secular values" was broken by these restrictions. It was also brought up that certain conservatives are subject to the *Hudood* Ordinance. Zia's assertion of an "Islamic system in the country" sparked a distinctive debate. The Hudood Laws, which are taken as the cornerstone of Zia government concentrated on imposing sanctions for specific offences that were expressly listed in sharia, such as stealing from private property, consuming alcohol, adultery, and fornication. These laws came under criticism from the women right organizations (Imran et al., 2020).

Despite the fact Zia is often criticized of having introduced the laws that were criticized by the International organization that work for the right of women, his government have certain positive steps at its credit related with the empowerment of women. First step taken to improve the condition of women was the appointment of a governmental commission on the Status of Women. Next step in this regard was the establishment of the women's division in Cabinet Secretariat. Lastly in 1981, *Majlis-e-Shoora* had twenty women, later this number was further increased to in the National Assembly that took oath in 1985.

However, Zia-ul-Haq started the process of *Islamization* by passing laws that discriminated against women. He encouraged purdah and forbade women from watching or participating in sports. He revoked all of the fundamental liberties protected by the 1973 Constitution, including the freedom from sex-based discrimination.

It is false to claim that "women" are treated in a certain way by the state in Pakistan; this presupposes that all women have the same interests or connections to governing bodies. The current legal standing of women in Pakistan was significantly influenced by Zia ul-military Haq's administration, which lasted from 1977 to 1987. A number of restrictive and backwards-

looking legislation, notably those pertaining to the treatment of women, were passed under his rule in an effort to reinforce fictitious boundaries between the public and private worlds. The Pakistani government had previously adhered to "secular norms," but these restrictions represented a change in course. They also contained the *Hudood Ordinance*, which applies a select group of fundamentalist interpretations of Islamic law to settle disagreements regarding "family law" and sexual conduct. Documentation on the status of women's rights also includes information from reports by regional non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for women's and human rights in Pakistan, press reports, historical surveys, and UN reports. This is because these institutions each have their own political and economic agenda. Having discussed the steps it is evident that women can be seen more active in Pakistani politics after 1971 which resulted in giving to the title to Pakistan of having first women Prime Minister in 1988. The success of women being the elected representative was not a sudden event it had its roots in the steps taken right from 1947 when the wife of Liaqat Ali Khan started taking steps for the empower of Women and finally resulted in having Pakistan as a female Prime Minister.

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