

ROLE OF WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS IN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

The central focus of this study is to delve into the roles and contributions of women parliamentarians during their tenure in the 13th National Assembly of Pakistan. Recognizing political participation as an inherent right of every individual, regardless of gender, caste, or creed, the research sheds light on the pivotal role played by women in shaping legislative discourse and policy-making processes. It contextualizes the historical trajectory of women's representation in Pakistani politics, highlighting the provision for reserved seats for women in previous constitutions, which lapsed in 1988, only to be reinstated in 2002 with a 17% quota in parliament. Against this backdrop, the study asserts that women parliamentarians in the 13th National Assembly made notable contributions by advocating for gender-specific issues and championing legislation aimed at addressing the diverse needs and concerns of women across Pakistan. Through their active engagement in parliamentary debates and legislative initiatives, these women lawmakers played a significant role in advancing the rights and interests of women, thereby contributing to the broader discourse on gender equality and inclusive governance.

Keywords: National Assembly, Legislation, Women Parliamentarians

INTRODUCTION

Women In the 20th century, participation in all spheres of life significantly increased. Even though gender engagement in professional domains is a relatively new phenomena, there are some fields where their contributions have changed over time. Every individual, regardless of gender, caste, or faith, has a basic right to participate in political processes. The freedom movement historically involved women. The Nation's founder, "Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, spoke at Aligarh University in 1944. He emphasized his dissatisfaction with restrictive social standards that limited women's roles. "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 within the four walls of the houses as prisoners" (Shaheed, 1988).

Two women were members of Pakistan's first constituent National Assembly after independence in

1947 (Mumtaz, 1998). Women were represented in the parliament at no more than 2.5 percent, and no women were elected to the second constituent National Assembly in 1955. (Mumtaz, 1998). Muslim females participated in All India Muslim League protests and demonstrations prior to Pakistan's freedom. Political parties have established female wing structures to promote women's political engagement in the nation. The Pakistani government has made substantial efforts over the past 20 years to boost the presence of women in legislative bodies. Women have had a larger part in national politics during the past few decades. However, some areas still require the government's specific attention. Political leaders like Fatima Jinnah served as role models.

Pakistan became the first Muslim nation to have a Female Prime Minister, Benazir Bhutto, in 1988. Pakistan has made great strides toward gender

equality in politics. In Accordance to the Inter Parliamentary Union (2017), stands Pakistan at the 45th ranking with aggregating 76 women representatives with proportion of 22.5% in the 13th National Assembly of Pakistan (2008-13).

In 13th National Assembly Women MPs emphasized gender-sensitive issues and continued to participate in addresses on legislation and laws pertaining to females rights. They also claimed credit for endorsing various pro-women policies, including the Domestic Violence Bill, The Criminal Law Act, The Protection of Women Against Harassment Act, and The Prevention of Anti-Women Practices Act, among others (Zaka,2012).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The Present study relies upon primary and secondary sources. So far as Primary sources are concerned, researcher has consulted National Assembly debates from 2008-2013. Moreover, secondary data is collected from different Books, Articles and Journals.

Participation of Female Parliamentarians in 13th National Assembly (2008-2013)

On February 18, 2008, the 13th National Assembly's general elections took place. After restoration and an increase in the number of reserved seats, these were the second elections (Wagha,2002-2007). On reserved seats, sixty women were elected. Following the 2008 election, the coalition led by Pakistan People Party appointed females to the cabinet. Several women served as ministers in critical positions such as social welfare and the special education ministry was chaired by Samina Khalid Ghurki. Shery Rehman, Firdos Ashiq Awan, and Hina Rabbani Khar served as Ministers of

Communication and Broadcasting, Health, and Foreign Affairs. Some of these female politicians then moved on to other ministries (Awan). It was hoped that issues related to women would be addressed after an increase in the number of females in the parliament because, prior to 2002, male legislators ignored them and hardly ever sponsored legislation pertaining to women (Musarat Jabeen and Sajid M.Awan, 2017). Female members came together to work on advancing gender-related issues in the National Assembly as a result of the changing circumstances. This action served to raise awareness of public forums as well as to advocate for the inclusion of these requests in public policy. It made sense because more people in the legislative body meant higher expectations and a sense of accomplishment. The 13th National Assembly (2008-2013) held 50 sessions in total, lasting 690 days, to carry out its fundamental function of passing new laws and modifying those already in place.

The House is only allowed to assemble for not less than 130 days in a year and must hold 3 sessions each year, according to Article 54(2) of the Pakistani Constitution of 1973 (1973, Constitution of Pakistan) for 132 days in the first legislative year, 136 days in the second, 134 days in the third, and 144 days in each of the 4th & 5th parliamentary years (FAFEN, 2008-2013).

First women speaker, Dr. Fehmida Mirza represented a significant achievement. Though only 18 of the 342 members of the House were directly elected women, constituting about 5% of the total membership. 78 female members-60 on reserved seats and 18 directly elected-made up the 13th National Assembly, or around 23% of the entire body.

Table 1

Women Representation in the National Assembly of Pakistan (1947-2013)

Legislature years	number of seats	Female Elected On General Seat	Reserved Seats for women	Total Seats Held by Women	Percentage of female seats
1st 1947- 1954	30	2	—	2	6.7%
2nd 1955-1958	80		—	0	0%
3rd 1962-1965	156	06	—	6	3.8%
4th 1965-1969	156	06	—	6	3.8%

5th 1972-1977	144	06	—	6	4.2%
6th March 2 to July 05, 1977	210	1	10	11	5.2%
7th 1985-1988	217	1	21	22	10.1%
8th 1988-1990	217	4	20	24	11.1%
9th 1990-1993	217	2	—	2	0.9%
10th 1993-1996	217	4	—	4	1.8%
11th 1997-1999	217	6	—	6	2.8%
12th 2002-2007	342	13	61*	74	21.2%
13th 2008-2013	342	16	60	76	22.2%

* One woman was elected to a minority-reserved seat. (<http://www.na.gov.pk> .com)

In 13th NA Females Parliamentarians at the national assembly focused on the topic of violence against women and strongly condemned it. A female member of parliament advised during a floor debate that violence should be eliminated. These discriminatory legislation against women, which restricted the fundamental rights of women, should be abolished. The government needs to take appropriate action to keep women and girls from abuse, forced marriages, acid assaults, honor killings, and domestic violence (NA Deb2008, 29 March volume 2, p.14 Bushra Gohar).

Nosheen Saeed opposes violence against women and calls for action to stop it. She advocated for the government to change and execute current laws to stop all types of abuse against female including domestic abuse (NA Deb 2008, June 24vol2, p.76).

MP, Mrs. Fouzia Ejaz, highlighted the government's incapability to put policies in place to keep females from domestic abuse. She argued that domestic abuse laws should be improved by government. (NA Deb.29 March 2008, p.47).one more MP, during a debate on the subject of crime against women, Nafeesa Shah called for separate female police stations. She suggested that the government hire more female police officers as the number of crimes against women continues to climb in order to help woman victims (NA Deb.22 Dec 2008p.13).

The problems were discussed by female MPs during the following legislative sessions as well. Ms. Khalida Mansoor ran a campaign in 2008–09 to raise awareness about the rise in reported cases of violence against females. She screamed the government for doing nothing to stop crimes including gender-based violence (NA Deb.9 April

2009 p.28). A female MP Nissar Tanveer charged the executive branch with brutality against women. She asked about the government's treatment of women (NA Deb.24 Jan2011p.9-10).

Domestic abuse is by far the most prevalent form of violence in Pakistan, according to ministries and organizations working to end violence against women. It's important to note that while female legislators spoke out against domestic violence, male lawmakers largely watched from the outside and only occasionally took part in the discussion. Women MPs had observed the inaction of the government and of the male MPs. Shagufta Sadiq criticized this kind of behavior. She had doubts concerning the government's activities and its decision to withhold details and figures regarding the total number of crimes against females. She criticized the government's response to a little uptick in domestic violence though debunking claims in the media that these occurrences are being alarmingly overstated (NA Deb 24 Jan 2011, p.22). However, she also expressed opposition the government's initiatives to stop domestic abuse of women. She appealed with the government to enact new laws and amend current ones in order to stop horrific incidents from happening again. A well-known politician and parliamentarian named Kashmala Tariq joined the conversation and fully agreed with Shagufta Sadiq's position, saying that concrete and practical steps must be taken at the federal level to end violence against women. MPs shouldn't rely only on speeches, she continued. (NA Deb.16 Dec 2011 p.34).

An additional member, Shagufta Jumani, asked the government to establish strategies in this area to support Kashmala Tariq's position. When discussing domestic violence, she said that passing the law is

insufficient until it is put into practice. While such measures are being put into place, institutions or organizations must exist that offer safety to domestic abuse victims. Dr. Atia Anayat Ullah, a female MP, criticized the administration and demanded that district-level welfare and mediation committees be established so that women may freely address issues associated to domestic abuse (NA Deb.6 June2008). Another member, Shagufta Jumani, requested the government to establish strategies in this area to support Kashmala Tariq's argument and to add to it. She said that unless the bill is put into practice, it won't be effective in addressing domestic abuse. While these actions are being carried out, there have to be some institutions or organizations that offer safety to domestic violence victims. One more female MP, Dr. Atia Anayat Ullah, criticized the administration, saying, "Government should establish welfare and conciliation committees at the district level through which women can independently address matters related to domestic abuse."

Regarding a widespread traditional behavior known as "honor killing," Marvi Memon brought up a significant issue. She alerted the lower house to legal flaws and held tribal Jirgas accountable for accrediting criminals to thwart prosecution as victim's relatives gave offenders amnesty under the pressure of tribal Jirgas (NA Deb .21 Dec 2010 p.19-24). Despite the government's prohibition on supporting up Jirgas and trading girls and women for goods to resolve local conflicts, another female parliamentarian, Justice (Retd) Fakhar un Nisa, claimed that the practice still persists across Pakistan (NA Deb. 23 Dec 2011 p.32).

Yasmeen Rehman strongly opposed honor killings as well as other obvious customary behaviors that are common in other provinces, particularly in Balochistan. She also considered the fact that, in reality, women do not participate in Jirgas, but rather that these practices are passed down as relics to the relatives of the victims (NA Deb. 23 Dec 2011 p. 24). In her investigation of the problem, Ms. Nafisa Shah made the clear case that, in reality, many political figures strengthen Jirgas to maintain their political and social influence over their constituents. It's a dangerous pattern. She went on to say that powerful political figures run Jirgas, mistreat

women, and shamelessly utilize the apparatus of the state to enforce their arbitration against women. Legislation is the primary function of parliament (Mushtaq, 2019). Not every bill is processed and approved. For instance, during the 13th NA's five-year term, 135 measures (116 from the government and 19 from private members) were passed. But 81 of them ended up as acts of parliament. Four (3%) of the 116 total government bills were introduced by women. Women introduced 15 (80%) of the 19 PMBs. Government services, education, electoral laws, the elimination of discretionary quotas in public housing programs, domestic violence against women, such as acid throwing events, and the outlawing of anti-women activities were the main areas of concentration of these bills.: Of the 189 total PMBs, 104 (55%) were introduced by women, whereas 38 (20%) were joint ventures with male coworkers. female made up 80 percent of all passed PMBs, demonstrating their commitment to the legislative process, but only 3 percent of all treasury passed bills, despite making up half of Pakistan's population and having a representation rate of 22 percent in the National Assembly. These bills were presented and approved:

1. The Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, 2010
2. The Acid Control and Acid Crime Prevention Bill 2010
3. The Criminal Law (Third Amendment) Bill 2010
4. Prevention of Anti-Women Practices Act, 2010
5. The Acid Control and Acid Crime Prevention Act, 2011
6. Women in Distress and Detention Fund (Amendment) Bill, 2011
7. Criminal Law (Amendment) Bill 2011
8. National Commission on the Status of Women Bill, 2012

8 bills were passed, demonstrating the effort made to address anti-women policies from 2008 to 2013 (13th NA). Women lawmakers actively pushed for the introduction of pro-women legislation, particularly in regard to issues like domestic abuse and harassment. Women participated played important roles at this time. As part of CEDAW and in accordance with international custom, two bills on gender rights were passed. One was to offer workplace harassment protection. The Act mandated

the adoption of an internal code of conduct by both public and private organizations in order to prevent workplace sexual harassment incidents. It encouraged more females to enter the workforce and support the national economy. Another bill, the Prevention of Anti-Women Practices Bill (Criminal Law Amendments), made various traditions such as forced marriages, denying women of inherited property, weddings based on the Holy Quran, or giving a female over to resolve a quarrel, illegal. The Acid Control and Acid Crime Prevention Act also addressed gender-based violence. In order to prevent acid from being used for horrific crimes, this Act forbids its import, production, sale, storage, and usage. Additionally, it demands that the State give legal protection to both acid and burn crime victims and their survivor. (Decade of Democracy in Pakistan (2008-2018), 2020) These legislations demonstrated Pakistan's commitment to as well as support for international law, treaties, and conventions in general. Other legislation addressed issues like sectarianism and child custody, outlawed discriminatory behaviour, and improved the status of women by creating commissions on women's status. (FAFEN, 2008-2013). The 18th constitutional amendment, which not only brought the system back on track, but also restored provincial autonomy, dealing with provinces' problems, was a major accomplishment of this assembly. It also repealed article 58-2 b, which limited the president's ability to dissolve the legislature.

CONCLUSION

Female parliamentarians played a key role in picking up issues related to women rights. They moved different bills for women in 13th national assembly. They actively participated in legislation, disproving the notion that politics is the preserve of men. When observing parliamentary processes, it becomes clear that female lawmakers were engaged and made significant contributions through legislative interventions. Women legislators have demonstrated remarkable passion during House debates on women-related matters, and their major performance in the House's legislative activity demonstrates their increased interest, commitment, and resolve to female's causes. An increase in the number of women in parliament has resulted in increasing engagement

in the legislative process. And it has started positive impact In Pakistan, sexual harassment has been defined as a misdeed and a criminal for the first time. There was no cohesive definition of sexual harassment prior to this announcement. At the end it is concluded that in this assembly women parliamentarians tried their best to protect women.

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