Socio-Cultural Challenges to Women's Political Participation:

By

[1] MahgulKhajjak, [2]Shazia Safdar Ali

Abstract:

Since the beginning of democratic system of government, it is observed that women's presence in political decision making is not strong as compare to men. However, equality in political participation is one of the permanent concerns for the empowerment of women all over the world. This study investigates and explores the challenges faced by women politicians in the political arena. The study has been conducted in Quetta, the capital city of province Balochistan. Qualitative research methodology has been used to get an in depth insight of the phenomenon. The data has been collected from 25 female members of different political parties through un-structured interview guide using purposive sampling method. The findings reveal that in Pakistani society various socio-cultural and political impediments exists which includes patriarchal system, restricted mobility, domestic responsibilities, which restrict women's political participation.

Keywords: Women politicians, Challenges, Socio cultural barriers, Pakistan etc.

Introduction:

Politics is domain of power and in Pakistan; it is under domination of men. In a patriarchal society like Pakistan women in all spheres of their life, socially and politically are discriminated. Women because of low skill, less opportunity in political system and less education are unable to contribute in the national development (Latif, 2015). Patriarchal system and gender stereotypes create barriers in the way of women empowerment, although the political system of Pakistan is usually considered as a "Men's domain" and mostly the political positions are occupied with men while women are restricted to domestic roles under the

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[1]M.Phil. Scholar Social Work Sardar Bahadur Khan Women University Quetta Pakistan
[2]Supervisor and Lecturer Sardar Bahadur Khan Women University Quetta Pakistan

four walls of home. Women's empowerment and political participation is diverse throughout regions and countries because of social and cultural system. Due to this, various problems exists across the globe (Asiyanbola, 2005).

In Pakistan women's position is secondary in political and economic matters; they do not have their say in these affairs. The political matters are affiliated with sex and gender where men are given the dominance over women. In Pakistani society women are occupied with the burden of societal pressures, socio- economic and religious restrictions and these barriers restricts women to move forward in political domain and also prevents from political skill development. At the same time the burden of domestic activities does not spare women to contribute in political affairs (Bari, 2005).

Participation of women in political sphere never allows women to address their issues and needs in their community and they cannot show the commitment towards political sensitivity in the present national and at local levels. Women mostly lack access to political decision making as compare to their opponents at all points of government (Moghadam, 2009).

In cultural and traditional environment of Balochistan male grows up, he finds out that being a male he has extra benefits from which women deprived as of cultural and traditional prestige. As women hardly find a opportunity to participate in politics due to limited time because of domestic duties (Samiuddin, 2010).

Another factor that is creating problems for women is that women in politics are seen as less confident, that's why the failure of women to perform well is automatically associated with their gender and not with the lack of skills and abilities. Women in political domain feel more stress to prove their capabilities and their abilities, as society do not accept them at this level due to our customary structure of our ancestors (Asiyanbola, 2005). Facilitating conditions for women at political level are crucial because of dominance of men over political arena. They never facilitate women at same level, they expect for themselves (Bari, 2005).

It's hence analyzed that the role of women, in common, while compromising with men in world seems to have more subordinating in nature then equal. Gender is mostly mistaken to be competing each other therefore it promotes the ideology of femininity and masculinity instead of sharing the power balance and it further narrates the roles and responsibility according to production ratio which certainly is higher from the men financially (Asiyanbola, 2005).

Women as not having much hold on productive activities, losses the authority on financial matters, ends on less part in decision maker and important factor in household matters therefore the overall society represents the same situation in all fields of life, education, health, employment and ownership of resources show same disparities in gender. It is crucial that women need to be equally financially strong as men is because every step of life describes women role according to its position and factors of cast,class,ethnicity and opportunities further add in promoting differences(Moghadam,2009).

South Asian countries even have another Burdon of cultural constraint of veil" parda" where women are restricted with her mobility on the name of culture, religion or ethnicity, this further discourage women to be the part of change and to participate in political activities for the empowerment of women role and this decrease the exposure of women and her ability to meet the society indicators to be equal to men (Shvedova, 2005).

Lack of female role models and domination of men over politics and political restrictions over decision regarding different problems effect negatively on women's participation as the participation of women in politics as women 's perspectives are ignored and due to this behavior woman themselves keep aside. Gender discrimination is also the reason that women do not get elected at power positions as men are the gate keepers in political parties (Bari, 2005).

As discussed earlier that patriarchal system is completely dominated by men, and when it comes to the family, the same rule applies. The Pakistani culture supports the patriarchal system and promotes the blockade segregation of women mostly with the use of religious restrictions.

Without the participation and interest of both men and women, and this type of development should also bring stable development should also keep a balance in empowerment of men and women (Ahmed, 2013).

Discrimination on the basis of gender is also another impediment that prevent women from going towards the top political positions as women's image is usually seen as of mothers and wives the private not the public one. These set roles restrict women from contributing in politics and from empowerment (Shvedova, 2005). The empowerment of women is not encouraged as it's a threat to the singular rule of men. Traditional and cultural barriers are one of the causes that hinder the active participation of women to obtain leadership positions, at the same time with the increased globalization, cultures, and technologies and opportunities, women face different and new challenges that vary on the basis of environment in which they operate (Elliott, 2015).

Another important factor that hinders women's political participation is male dominant political structure and political culture that keeps women behind. This culture usually promotes a male perspective on political issues; also women are not elected at power positions because of male biases of male dominance (Latif, 2015).

Lack of economic resources is also a disturbing factor for women to participate in political arena. Women find it difficult to be involved in politics because of lack of financial resources and due to their double roles very short period of time is available to them, they are left with little time to take part in political decision making as politics demands women's exposure to make interactions with people publically and to attend public gatherings (Elliott, 2015). Women also lack political exposures and interactions that are important for them to put an influential impact on political decision making. Women lack the useful information about politics and which is necessary for power positions (Naz& Chaudhry, 2011).

The main purpose of this study is to find out the factors that affect women to participate and contribute in leadership and decision making process, accordingly this research will investigate about the experiences of women politicians.

In politics women usually face prejudice and sexism from people. People criticize on every matter of politician's life and women are afraid of being interfered into their personal lives including criticism of personal appearances, negative critiques about the character of female politicians and about their married life (Ahmed, 2013). Most of the time husbands of women politicians are discussed negatively and are considered weak in front of wives. Male politicians often attack on the character of female politicians to disturb them and to make opponent weak by such things. Along with this political harassment is another problem that is disturbing active women in political domain. It discourages the active participation of women politicians as women find it difficult to confront such type of violence (Neil & Domingo, 2016). It multiplies the domination of men over politics and political decision making and it destroys the beauty of democracy and development of human rights (Bari, 2005).

Research Method:
The overview of the literature showed that women face numerous challenges in political arena around the world. This research focuses on the challenges faced by women politicians in Pakistan. The study was Qualitative in nature and the data was collected by using purposive sampling method. Twenty-five in-depth interviews were conducted using semi structured interview guide to get an insight of the topic. After review

of literature themes were made in the earlier stage of research and codes were developed and data was compiled under these codes and themes. The interviewees were from different political parties of Balochistan.

Results:
Challenges Faced by Women Politicians:

The most important factor that hindered women's political participation is the ideology about gender roles to keep women in homes as wives and mothers. However, this ideology is not static but fluctuate according to the social, cultural and political set up of a particular society. Women are considered just as home maker throughout the nations which results their exclusion from politics and other outdoor activities. According to respondents

"People of our society never allow women to join a field that is not feminine as it is not suitable for her to work with men and compete with them. Politics especially is considered as a no go area for women and this norm is given by our cultural and traditional system"

Women face hurdles in respect with social and cultural traditions, society does not accept women 'place within the circle of co gathering. The male dominant society provides little space to the women in the field of politics because of our values and rigid traditions (Naz, Ibrahim and Ahmad, 2012). In regard of cultural values, society thinks that women participating in politics creates imbalance and never praise women for outside activities. As perception it is considered that women are just responsible for household work, they do not welcome women for any other job (Neil and Domingo, 2016).

"Women in our society have to follow the norms and values very strictly because society expects women as the lady who fulfills the household tasks as well as who is role model that keeps family together."

Women politicians agreed on the point that culture is related to development, and development helps women to stand equally with men in society. Inevitably, this draws focus on culture and background of a certain nation, as the dominant culture often reflects how a woman is treated and perceived in that nation. In the opinions of respondents

"It's actually our culture; we have been following for centuries that woman is less qualified and less deserving to be developed. This thinking structure and dominant culture of keeping women as inferior part of our society is responsible for less participation of women in politics."

Male dominancy in political framework is one more aspect that hindered participation of women in politics. Along with this women's socio cultural dependency is also contributing factor to draw back women's position within political arena. According to a respondent

The life cycle of women is dominated by the male members of her family weather it's about her education, marriage or career, the decision making is always done by men. This set up is given by our culture that defines women's dependency upon men in every sphere of life.

According to the respondents, Socialization setup shows the division of gender roles between men and women and it distinguishes women as inferior to men in all spheres of life. Socialization theories emphasize on selective roles for both genders, where women are taught since her childhood to be sub ordinate to men. It claims that these attitudes are acquired early in life through the existence of traditional gender roles in home and family. One of the respondents said

"In our Pakistani system, daughter is always considered to stay at home since her childhood and son is allowed to go out and earn for family. This kind of upbringing makes girls less confident to go out and choose politics as a career and to work for the people as a leader."

Respondents also considered restricted mobility as a barrier as they are not allowed to make public appearances as a politician, which pose a huge challenge for women to participate in politics actively.

Female mobility is often restricted against male rivals due to family and tribal customs. Concept of "Chadur and Char diwari" for women is preferred. Patriarchal systems affect the career choices of women along with restricting their mobility and relate it directly to the respect and honor of family traditions (Shaheed, 2010). Women participation is neither encouraged nor accepted fully. Keeping men nor women a part in every field and observing parda is the additional restriction for women smooth mobility and participation (Bari, 2005).

Respondents said

"One of the major reason of less participation of women in politics is our rigid cultural value system because it is followed blindly and it closes doors for women to join politics as it is assumed a man' field."

Discussion:

The findings reveal that women face numerous challenges in politics including socio- cultural and political barriers that hinders women to participate fully and contribute in the process of decision making.

Women being a political figure, she maintains family matters as well as political issues. Domestic roles keep women busy and never sphere her to participate in political matters, with the common mentality of people in

our society that women are a home maker, not a decision maker. Pakistan is a patriarchal society where men hold all the power and women only obeys his decisions. Patriarchal system restricts women to domestic roles only; these restrictions create hurdles for women to move towards their empowerment as the patriarchal system denies the women's role in politics. It also decreases the opportunities for women to join politic.

The data of this study reveals that the most intractable barrier to women's political participation is the deep rooted patriarchal and cultural setup. It defines that women's place is inside the four walls of home and politics is only suitable for men. Women hold a subordinate role both in society and family and this trend has become more prominent.

Findings showed that women in politics are seen as an accidental members and women's failure is typically associated with their gender instead of lack of professional skills and learning opportunities. Thus this situation put more pressure on women to prove that they are capable for political representation.

Findings reveal that living in traditional and tribal system women are considered weak as compare to men and not strong enough to handle critical situations and issues, this perception provide less opportunity for women to contribute in political decision making. Patriarchal set up of Pakistani society is one of serious issues, women politicians face and this system is particularly strong at grass root level, women in every matter of life, relies on their spouses and cannot show the courage to make their own decisions and this followership leads to dependency over men.

Conclusion:

To conclude, it can be said that in societies where patriarchal set-up is very strong like Pakistan, women are expected to depend upon men and in this situation women's empowerment does not seems practical, it only sounds theoretical. Society gives less freedom and less opportunity to women as far as political positions are concerned; women face much more problems than men. However, the findings of current research paper revealed that in Pakistan the role of women politicians is determined by socio- cultural values and patriarchal tradition.

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