



POLITICAL PATHWAYS: FACTORS OF SUCCESSFUL WOMEN LEADERSHIP IN PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

While Pakistani women's socio-economic status and formal political rights have witnessed a marked improvement in the last two decades, however, females remain underrepresented in the political institutions of the country at local levels of governance particularly. Although political activism and interest in Pakistani females' political participation has increased, and the consideration of women's experiences in their pursuit of elected office remains limited. Through a critical reading of the literature on women and politics and a comprehensive examination of experiences in Pakistan, this article highlights gaps between gender parity and elite-biased empirical studies of women's political advancement and the conditions, processes, and outcomes observed across five provinces of Pakistan. Drawing on original ethnographic research in Pakistan in both general and local bodies' elections including the Senate, this article spotlights chronological development of women's political participation and identifies major pathways by which women in Pakistan have sought election and re-election to secure their position in political offices. In so doing, this article highlights the significance of understanding women's varied experiences as voters, participants of the political process and ultimately members of the assemblies and also suggests a comprehensive agenda for further research.

Keywords: Feminist leadership; political pathways; Pakistan; successful women

Introduction

Pakistan is a developing country and owing to various social, cultural and religious attributes Pakistani society entails, women's leadership positions in many departments and organizations are marginalized to the core when compared with their male counterparts. The number of women constitutes almost half of the population of the country and therefore, the involvement of women can contribute to the potential human capital with an equal share if they would be provided with the same opportunities.

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Because they are sizeable in number, it is impossible to ignore women because of the current challenges of the competitive world where it is insane to leave any of the potential resources unutilized and females' workforce is unquestionably the most crucial one of them (Tran, White, Chow, & Kiuger, 2001). Across Pakistan, women remain neglected and under-represented in national mainstream institutions particularly in political institutions' representations at national as well as local levels. During Zia Ul-Haq's regime from 1978 to 1988, the country had witnessed the traditional and Islamic hegemony of the rule of law in Pakistan that restricted the political and social role of women at a certain level throughout the country. Although women had been given opportunities to participate in education and healthcare departments while their participation at political and economic fronts remained very limited. The basic reason for women's political marginalization is the existing patriarchal systems where women, in the Pakistani political arena, are accepted only as proxies or an extension of male politicians (Mehdi, 2015). However, a very small number of distinguished and gifted women coming up with their idiosyncratic potential took part in politics and those who had been blessed with elite political ties, landlord families and the females who adhered to human rights activities during Zia Ul-Haq's regime and later actively participated in party-based political activities. In this very outset, this article tries to explore the major connections through an extensive and detailed analysis tracing the political pathways for women which contributed a great deal in establishing a successful women leadership in Pakistani politics.

This study contends that an assessment of Pakistani women's successful political pathways to participate in local and national political institutions gives rise to valuable insights for the comprehension of the role of women in Pakistani politics and further gives an exponential rise to the theoretical literature on women's role in third world countries' politics. For better



understanding, this article is divided into three sections; the first one addresses scholarly literature about democratic reforms, a quota system for women, and chronological development of women's participation in politics in Pakistani. The second section explores women's participation and role of electoral process and decentralization along with major factors behind successful women leadership while the final section comprises a comprehensive and detailed analysis of the political pathways for women to become successful in politics.

1. Chronological Development of Women's Participation in Politics

The disparity between the male and female population in Pakistan has witnessed a variety of indicators like socio-cultural, socio-economic, literacy rate, and the most important impact of male-dominant patriarchal structures (UNDPP, 2005). This gender discrimination caused obstacles for women in showcasing their potential in national development particularly through politics, however, during last two decades; a significant development in terms of women's participation in politics at national and local levels as well as successful retention of public offices in various political institutions has been witnessed. Resultantly, a significant increase in women representation was witnessed in legislative bodies where this political development is attributed to certain factors that shaped smooth political pathways for women to actively participate in national politics. United Nations' development programs played a crucial role in shaping Pakistani women's political face through certain legal commitments Pakistan carried out such as international covenant on civil and political rights (ICCPR), the committee on the elimination of discrimination against women (CEDAW) and the universal declaration of human rights (UDHR) played a major part in shaping political future for women in Pakistan. In 1995, the 4th World Conference on women also acknowledged the struggle for Pakistani women's rights and their efforts to eliminate the gender gaps in national institutions (Awan, 2016).



The discussion on women's representation in political institutions in Pakistan has mainly remained cramped to the idea of quotas and reserved seats for them. The first and foremost pathway for women's political participation is defined in the constitution of 1973 that reserved 10 seats for women in the National Assembly of Pakistan along with the generally elected members as their colleagues. This step helped a great deal in promoting women in regular politics for the upcoming three elections or the period of ten years so that women would reach at par with male politicians and in so doing, no further need for special reservations for women would be acquired.

The optimism adhered to the 1973 constitution for women's reserved seats, however, proved to be gone astray in General Zia Ul-Haq's regime although he doubled the number from 10 to 20 seats for women but did not extend the timeline for these reserved quotas. Resultantly, the reserved seats expired after the 1988 elections and the upcoming three parliaments in 1990, 1993, and 1997 remained without women's reserved seats (Aurat Foundation, 2012). This lapse of women's reserved seats in 1988: the representation of women in assembly through electoral school had become alarmingly low. The proportion of women's representation in the National Assembly elected in 1997 dropped to just 3.2 % and in the Senate 2.4 % while in all four provincial assemblies to only 0.4% (Aurat Foundation, 2001). This alarming situation became a matter of serious concern among human rights organizations as well as for women's rights activists to protect the substantive female representation in Pakistani politics. Later this issue was addressed officially in a report of the commission of inquiry for women appointed by the government and this commission was headed and supervised by Mr. Justice Nasir Aslam Zahid from the Supreme Court of Pakistan. He remarked in the commission report that for an effective and genuine democratic process, equal participation of male and female candidates is a prerequisite in political institutions as well as in decision-making committees. Therefore, it is unfortunate that major decisions in



forms of law and policies are made by male governing bodies and committees that directly affect the lives of women without their significant participation. This is the primary reason for the adaptation of many discriminatory laws and marginalized policies for women. He concluded his remarks and said, “while it is vital for females to have significant participation on issues of particular concerns to them along with equally critical to have their opinion and views in the decision-making process in all national matters” (Report of The Commission of Inquiry for Women, 1997).

The 4th United Nations World Conference on Women held in September 1995 in Beijing played a vital role in launching a campaign for 33% representation of women in all politically elected bodies. Pakistani political milieu was at that time much in need of such breakthroughs where women were already fighting for their representation in the assemblies and policy-making bodies. For the implementation of 33% quota for women, Aurat Foundation took the leading role along with other human rights watch and women’s rights organizations and the three major political parties of the country at that time; Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Awami National Party (ANP) unanimously discussed the matter in a round table meeting and jointly declared the restoration of reserved political quotas for women. In 1998-99, a countrywide campaign was undertaken to implement 33% representation of women in assemblies and at last, all four provincial assemblies along with National Assembly and the Senate had approved the unanimous resolution and it was the highest achievement for the development of women’s participation in the political history of Pakistan.

Later in 2002 through a ‘Legal Framework Order’, General Musharraf increased the number of women representatives in National Assembly to an impressive 60 seats and also the same number suggested for the provincial assemblies. While during local elections in 2002, 33% representation



women was ensured in local councils and national and international human rights and women's rights organizations welcomed this ordinance. Table 1 shows the chronological historical development in women's reserve quotas in Pakistan.

Table 1 the representation of women in local bodies' electionsⁱ

Year of local election	The reversed quota for women
1959	No reserved quota
1977-1988	2% at Union council and 10% at district council except in NWFP
1988-1991	2%
1991-1993	10%
2002-2008, 2013	33%

However, this flow was adopted in 2008, 2013 and the latest 2018 elections and a significant increase in women's political candidates and participation have been witnessed. In 2013 general elections, women gained 70 seats of National Assembly out of 342 which are almost 20.5% of the total number of seats whereas in upper house 17 women out of 100 seats were elected while in 2018 election, 69 out of 342 in National Assembly and 20 out of 104 in the Senate which is almost 19%ⁱⁱ. Although discriminatory practices based on gender are hurdles to accelerating the pace of women's empowerment in the domains of politics, the statistical representation of women in legislative bodies have shown progressive trends. It shows that almost 20% of the total members of legislative bodies are women (see Table 2). However, this level of representation of women in legislative bodies includes the effects of the women's quota, which came into effect during 2002. Table 2 Women Legislature representation after the 2013 electionⁱⁱⁱ



Legislature (Assemblies and Senate)	Women elected on reserved seats				
		Women elected on general seats	Women on minorities seats	Women representation out of total	Percentage of women's representati on
	No. of total=% of total	No. of total=% of total	No. of total=% of total	total	
National	60/342=17.5	9/272=3.3	1/10=10	70/342	20.5
Senate	17/100=17	----	----	17/100	17
Punjab	66/371=17.8	9/295=3.0	1/8=12.5	76/371	20.5
Sindh	29/168=17.3	2/130=1.5	0/9=0	31/168	18.5
KPK	22/124=17.7	0/90=0	0/3=0	22/124	17.5
Baluchistan	11/65=16.9	1/51=2.0	0/3=0	12/65	18.5
Overall	205/1170=17.5	21/847=2.5	2/33=6.0	228/1170	19.5

While table 3 shows the representation of women in the 2018 election and also testifies the statement that women in the last two decades gained political empowerment and defined their ways to establish key political positions.

Table 3: Distribution of Seats in the National Assembly in Pakistan 2018^{iv}

	Punjab	Sindh	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	Balochistan	FATA	Federal Capital	Total
General	148	61	35	14	12	2	272
Women	35	14	8	3	0	0	60
Non-Muslims	--	--	--	--	--	--	10
Total	183	75	43	17	12	2	342



These numbers show the persistent chronological development of women's participation in politics and women's strategies during the electoral process to gain more public support.

2. Women's Political Activism and Electoral Process

Pakistani women have always adopted a wide range of political strategies for accessing significant representation, power, and intervention in the realm of politics: leading movements for themselves, forging alliances, establishing NGOs, negotiating their rights, inserting their agendas into the existing discourses of national and international politics and creating their strategies as well. For women's political activism in Pakistan as well as in other parts of South Asia, non-government autonomous organizations played an integral part for self-expression and acknowledgment of their social, economic and political rights like Aurat Foundation founded in 1986 in Pakistan that played the leading role in the implementation of 33% quota for women in local elections in 2002 in Pakistan. In the 1980s, women's rights activists during General Zia's military dictatorship regime struggled hard to carry their agenda to support women. At that time, political parties and all forms of political manifestations were banned while women's rights were being rescinded at an alarming rate, and the contours of womanhood were being redefined by the State's aggressive media campaigns, policy statements, and directives. In such circumstances, The Women's Action Forum (WAF) a platform for women initiated in 1981 to access and provides a wide range of women's rights movements, activities, seminars, workshops, lectures, political involvement at local levels (Mumtaz and Shaheed, 1990). Therefore, such platforms for women's political and social activism performed a vital role in establishing a sound base for women leadership and its immediate result in 1988 elections was witnessed when Benazir Bhutto became the first-ever female Prime ministe



not only of Pakistan but also in the whole Islamic world along with the distinguished record of being the youngest Prime Minister of any country.

In the political history of Pakistan, there are a few distinguished and exceptional women who have always secured to hold key positions in political institutions and power offices being the heads of the state like Benazir Bhutto, leaders of oppositions also Benazir Bhutto, foreign ministers Hina Rabbani Khar, spokespersons of major political parties such as Marriam Orangaib from PLM-N and Nafisa Shah from PPP while Firdos Ashiq Awan from PTI as well as the speakers and deputy speakers of national and provincial assemblies such as Fehmida Mirza and Shehla Raza respectively. Nonetheless, it is not quite a large amount of women's representation in public offices to stand for women who are almost 50% of the population of the country. There is a very low number of females to come forward to contest elections and lead political parties as they represent only five to ten percent of the central legislatures. The electoral system in Pakistan is fairly rigid and dominated by patriarchal structures that limited women's space, agency as well as mobility. Although females actively took part in elections after 'Legal Framework Ordinance' issued by General Musharraf in 2002 to until the 14th National Assembly elections in 2018, however, the available statistics and literature obtained from the members of 13th National Assembly elected in 2013 show that women participation had not been acknowledged properly on equality bases and also remained unsuccessful in getting the due credit of nomination from the respective political parties as a whole^v. In this 13th assembly, political parties nominated only a total of 3.5% women nominations among the 96.5% of men candidates. To contextualize this situation, Yusuf (2013) described that the minor number of women's nomination shows low confidence of political parties on female candidates contrasts with the political activism which has been observed among women in Pakistan since 2002. However, there are many factors in Pakistani society that influence the



women's political progress and advancement particularly their decision making positions in political institutions. According to United Nations Development Program (UNDP) 2005, in patriarchal structures, the women are considered a passive vote bank and their political parties consider them useful for usually political gatherings, representatives of public campaigns, meetings and gain the women voters' support in particular.

3. Political Pathways for Women

3.1 Key Pathways for Women Leadership as Politicians

Bertaux and Thompson (1997) suggest that the political pathways refer to mechanisms through which women decide to seek political power, mobilize resources, explore options, build distinctive political styles and develop relationships or networks with constituents. Moreover, women follow these pathways in which they select a particular course of action, proactively realize their projects, react to the outside world; the path decodes "the complexity of the sequences of cause and effect in human lives" (17). The study has a small sample; it can only provide a glimpse of such contextual complexity to what factors are involved which motivates women to pursue their political career and how they use them. As Tadros (2011) views that women's political journeys are influenced by motivations in particular leadership styles appear whether in terms of choosing different paths of political mobility or their leadership styles. Besides, these pathways are also devised by how they win or seek their political power, as the sources of electoral strategies and political capital used by female members. Evidence by the literature and findings of the study, three major pathways of women's political advancement are identified in Pakistan. The first two groups are well known but the latter one has received less attention. Fleschenberg (2008) views that those whose assumption of power was "mediated" by male relatives; and those whose politica



careers were “shaped from the beginning by their own choices, attributes, and efforts, grounded in a strong sense of their political efficacy” (35).

Women residing in an elite class win family support to start their political journey, while those of the second elite pathway on a specific social issue. In addition to these factors, these two prominent features of women’s political development elaborate on the continually low number of women who are in the power of local bodies’ political affairs. To thrust into the political arena where men still control and dictate the whole situation of political and power games, women must need to concentrate fully on the pathways and factors helpful in gaining political power either for themselves or for their upcoming fellow women.

In the meantime, there is a third type of category which is slowly forming, admittedly residual, diverse, but also very important in this context. Moreover, in some respects, middle pathways reflecting socioeconomic, institutional and demographic changes in Pakistan. It seems that these emerging middle pathways are attracted by mostly younger generations of women, neither from accidentally stumbling nor from elitist backgrounds onto politics. Usually, they have been seen in pursuing easy-going ways to access political positions as well as representation in policymaking, social acknowledgment, and financial benefits. Women are seen in the last two decades proactive in entrepreneurial attitude to choose their electoral strategies strengthened and mixed with new and traditional approaches.

Politics is the art or the trigonometry of governance which involves power, authority or the essence of public life. Exercising politics has been in the hands of dominants (males), and women have not been provided a brighter chance to carry out this as a profession. However, due to cultural diversity, and form of government in Pakistan, woman plays a pivotal role in the governance.



Historically speaking, women have not been provided with such an easy path to exercise leadership in Pakistan. Due to this very reason, women in Pakistan are confronted with hardships of varied sorts in real-life situations as compared to their male counterparts. Culture, tradition, and Islamic ideological perspective prevails the concept of women representation in Pakistan. The common beliefs that women should remain confined to their homes and permission of participating in politics remain controversial issues in Pakistan.

However, nowadays, women have been playing a key role in almost every field. Since President Musharraf's reformation in the representation of women in the parliament of Pakistan, women have actively been participating and finding ways to be a part of leadership in almost every field. For this reason, women in Pakistan have found a wide range of strategies to get into the race of politics, authoritative positions or leadership for governance. Firstly, women inheriting a strong political background show their interference in existing discourses, lead some private movements on social media for their top leaders, counterfeiting alliance, and create their pathways to be the key member of the society. Secondly, the running of the non-government organization has also significantly contributed to up-surgings in women in the political environment. Some of the educated and economically well-established women are proactively engaged in the smooth functioning of the on-ground working unions, advocacy while initiating organized movements in favor or against the political parties which resultantly open new pathways for women to participate in politics being a very useful and proactive member of the society. Despite the grave issues about the political background, education, and economic stability, the improvement of the quota system for women has also opened new avenues for women to avail of rising opportunities in politics. Whereas, Musharraf's government highly emphasized reserved rights of women in the state with a popular



motto of “enlightened Pakistan” and increased number of reserved seats from 3% to 33% in a lower house and 17% respectively in an upper house in Pakistan.

Women’s proactive involvement in politics in Pakistan has initiated a new point of debate since the early twentieth century. However, women still face cultural and social barriers in different leadership positions. Brown (1997) and Sperandio & Kagoda (2008) identify some of the key factors which place stumbling blocks for women on their journey of becoming a political leader. For instance, the authors claim that there are some internal and external, societal, cultural barriers that impede women’s growth to participate actively in politics and carry weight. However, according to Wever (2007), societal and cultural barriers are the two major factors that have restrained women for choosing politics. Supplementing the same stance, Inglehart & Norris (2000) highlight the importance and development of female leadership in politics.

On the contrary, prevalent cultural influence, the so-called religious factor, and diverse social restrictions present a gloomy picture in Pakistan. Roomi and Parrot (2008) touch upon the intricacies of the selection of careers for males and females in Pakistan at an early age. According to the authors, parents decide at an early age of their children what they need to do in the future. For instance, Benazir Bhutto, the first female Prime Minister of Pakistan, though, was brought up in the elite and powerful political family, her father Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, ex-prime minister of Pakistan, decided to train her as a political representative. It is significant to mention here that despite challenges, barriers, and deprivation of rights, women have been actively participating in politics in Pakistan. To gain deeper insights into the entire discussion, an explicit description of the diverse pathways for women is required to be given due consideration. In this connection, the probable key pathways are mentioned as under:



3.2 Pathways at Elite class Level

Family ties in elite class are critical to women's political careers in the world in general but in Pakistan, the criticality of the issue gets more grave, although men also benefit from familial networks for their political gains. Women often enter politics to carry on the achievements and reputations of their fathers, husbands or brothers. According to Beaman et al., (2012), role models at home provide greater influence on girls to attain the knowledge and confidence to exercise leadership capabilities. In this context, the family plays a pivotal role in providing quality education, training girls since their adolescent to participate actively in politics. Singh (2014) argues that women receive a political upheaval at home when they are encouraged by their fathers, husbands or brothers (Singh, 2014). In Pakistan, many women leaders found a home environment as an incubator to be prepared for future leadership. For instance, Pakistan's only female Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto found in her father, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the greatest training institute at home. However, she also received her political education from the Oxford which is indeed a privilege not extended to everyone in the Pakistani context. So, the family connection proves a greater source to empower women and open pathways to political power. As the daughter of Prime Minister of Pakistan, Benazir Bhutto inherited the political trigonometry and the plethora of democracy from her home. Traveling, participating and being a more active participant than other siblings, she learned and led the country twice (1988-1990) and again from 1993-1996).

The strong family ties are very crucial for women to establish a successful political career especially in countries dictated and controlled by men like Pakistan, although males also gain benefits from their family connections to achieve political stability (McVey, 2000; Sidel, 2004; Ufen, 2006; Hawkeworth, 2012). It is globally witnessed that women usually enter in politics to carry on the family's political legacy and erect their empire on it like two best examples in Pakistan are Benazir



Bhutto the daughter of Zulfiqar Bhutto 4th President (1971-1973) and 9th Prime Minister of Pakistan (1973-1979) while Maryam Nawaz the daughter of Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif a three-time Prime Minister of Pakistan (1990-1993, 1997-1999, 2013-2017). Such patterns are also followed in other Asian countries as well, according to Tapales (2001), in the Philippines the elite patterns are also discernible at national and local levels of political legacies.

Another leading politician in Pakistan, Fehmida Mirza also coming from an elite class of Pakistan, and a famous businesswoman who has served at a key position in government as a speaker in National Assembly which is the ultimate achievement in her professional career as a woman politician. Some of the other leading female politicians like Maryam Nawaz, daughter of former Prime Minister Nawaz Shariff, Hina Rabbani Khar, Sherry Rehman, and Shazia Marri have also strong political or economic footings which made their entry to politics unhindered.

3.3 Pathways at Grassroots level

Unlike stereotypical images of Asian women landing powerful positions due to their familial ties, these “grassroots” women launch their political engagements out of their frustration with corrupt and incompetent leadership or are motivated by a community issue ignored by the local government. Usually, women at lower levels are not encouraged to participate and get into politics so openly and directly in the male-dominated field of politics in Pakistan. According to Fleschenber (2008), “local women lack the support to enter the race of leadership”. He further asserts that women at the local level perform as problem-solvers and then, seek support from different politicians, or economical strong public figures in the society. However, after working at the local level and in various communities, initiating door-to-door awareness campaigns and establishing a deeper level of



proximity knowing people in person while helping or assisting them in their petty issues, these women conceive a goal to participate in the election and join politics as a career. On the contrary, women who enjoy the elite pathways are found more active and well equipped with more political experience because of the active presence of their family members, unending resources and deep connections and interactions with senior politicians. Whereas, women's participation in politics is insignificant for the reason that other women have no accessible pathways in comparison to elite class women in Pakistan. The number of participants is insignificant than in other European countries. In this connection, Wirth (2001) argues that:

The reason for this small increase is because of the presence of strict glass ceilings in the form of norms and values which restrict the activities of females and restricts their journey in managerial positions. One of the major barriers to a female appointment at managerial roles is the lack of sufficient education and skills.

On the other hand, some women politicians such as Marvi Memon's connection with girls at grass root level galvanize women to excel in politics. She demonstrates her identity by claiming deeper connections at the grassroots level, showing her proximity with the marginalized people of the society being a representative of the youth of Pakistan. In Pakistan, women face issues of representation, identity, social class and pressure of family in their quest of a career more particularly in the field of politics. According to Roomi and Parrott (2008):

In Pakistan, the role of boys and girls are divided at an early age, females are given the role of family caretakers, and therefore, they study the courses which bring empathy, patience, and skills related to housework in them while boys



are more interested in business studies and professional life development.

However, women politicians with no supreme connection at the party level, economically profound or a strong family connection with the other successful politicians, lack in dealing with the complexities and challenges in the country. Such females face ancestral control in all matters including if they are working on leadership positions.

3.4 Middle pathways

The middle pathways reflect both broad socio-economic, demographic and institutional changes and what might be best characterized as the pursuit of politics as a vocation through entrepreneurial experimentation with a diversity of strategies for acquiring and maintaining political power. Some of the key factors in Pakistan have raised the awareness and quest for becoming a leader. For instance, the development in the education sector, a strong aspiration of becoming a leader, representation of region, class, or ethos, women's rights, or the gender equality notions have categorically fetched the tremendous changes in the country.

Middle pathways have opened the doors of women belonging to every class, creed, or community, including housewives, university students, shop-keepers, lawyers, doctors and social service working women. The awareness of gender equality and equal opportunities have contributed a great deal in stumbling women of the lower class and promoted the chance of transforming their career to a permanent political career.

While discussing the pathways of achieving a secure position in party and politics, many women in Pakistan gained popularity and seats on expedient position. The key point is, many women politicians come from an upper class of society with a strong political connection and influence. On ground levels, all political parties have not been successful in providing equal opportunitie



and parity in the representation of women which is indeed a big question mark on their credibility as advocates of true democracy.

PML-N one of the strongest political parties in Pakistan submitted 27 women nominees for National Assembly (NA) for reserved seats from the quota of Punjab. Almost all women have strong family ties with the political figures within the party. For instance, Ishrat Ashraf, a wife of Senator Jaffar Iqbal, his daughter Zaib Jaffar is also an active member of the party. Tahira Aurangzeb and her daughter Mariam Aurangzeb was the daughter of former information minister belonging to PML-N. Similarly, Pervaiz Malik, a key figure of the PML-N party has promoted his wife, Shaista Pervez, and son too. Whereas, Khawja Asif's wife Musarrat and his niece, Shaza Fatima were nominated on the reserved quota system. Senator Mushahidullah's daughter Rida Khan was also nominated in the assembly on reserved quota. Maryam Nawaz's private staff and other members were adjusted in Punjab assembly on reserved quota. Subsequently, Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) also divided seats based on political ties, a strong political connection, and a strong business deal. For instance, Faryal Talpur and Dr. Azra gained the benefit of being sisters of Co-chairman, Asif Ali Zardari. Both the sisters were chosen on reserved seats. Moreover, the daughter of Nisar Khurro, Nida, and Parveen Qaim Khani and her daughter, Rubina, was also nominated on the reserved quota. Both of Zardari's sisters have also been contesting elections on general seats. Their names have been put for reserved seats to meet any eventuality in case they fail to win indirect elections.

Whereas a newly born party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has also distributed seats based on quota, and new faces were introduced in the assembly. Some women like Talat Naqvi, Dr. Zarqa Raheela were nominated on reserved seats but not on higher positions as compared to women



like Musarrat Cheema who had strong political ties within the party. As the reserved seat system depends on the party, it only provides benefits to the party, not to the people. All the women who are nominated on reserved seats are accountable to political parties instead of people. For this reason, parties give tickets to men for general seats and accommodate all women of reserved seats. The system also gives parties, rather than voters, more control on the reserved seats. Therefore, women chosen on reserved seats often feel more accountable to their parties than voters. The study, in this entire context, aims at investigating the pathways, societal and cultural barriers, and factors affecting women to participate in politics as a profession. It follows a qualitative approach and theoretical underpinning of the phenomenological perspective.

4. Discussion, Conclusion, and Agenda for Future Studies

After having encompassed the entire issue of political pathways for women from all the probable dimensions, the researchers traced certain significant observations that could not go unnoticed. Political pathways in Pakistan, when compared to the past, showcase a significant increase in the proportion of women who have been elected to legislative bodies, mainly because of the quota that allocates seats specifically to women. While on the contrary, a higher proportion of women are contesting elections for legislative bodies' to general seats as well. It is significant to mention that women are using their right to vote more actively than the worsened case in the past. Their proactive participation in the 13th and 14th National Assembly of Pakistan is a testimony to the fact that their dynamism and proximity with the people of Pakistan have duly been acknowledged. The same can be doubly authenticated by the nominations of the leading women by different political parties. Similarly, more women contested seats in the 2013 election as compared to the 2008 elections. While examining the case of limited political empowerment of women, the researchers



reached very observable indicators. It was observed that the entire issue of limited empowerment of women can directly be associated with diverse socio-cultural practices and the grave issue of economic dependency of women on the male counterpart. Making the entire issue more worsened, low rates of literacy and gender segregation in social roles are other factors that significantly impede women's participation. Women's participation cannot be effective unless there is progressive socio-cultural change, which should be initiated through a bottom-up approach. This implies that initially, women need to be empowered at social and economic fronts. This is the only way following which women can play progressive and authoritative roles in the political system. Currently, political indicators of women's political empowerment are due entirely to top-down approaches, like the quota, which are effected through the legislative measures. However, the structural discrimination embodied in socio-cultural practices still constitutes the normative set of practices within political parties. The distribution of roles, responsibilities, and party nominations are concrete examples of such behaviors and attitudes.

So, the idealistic environment in this entire connection can be acquired through true empowerment, effective participation of women, and their proactive engagement in the political system. The tempo of the entire case can be accentuated if the existing political structure is refined through systematized changes in normative practices at the local level and in societal institutions (particularly in the family and the economy) and through the initiation of purpose-built awareness and promotional sessions at a larger scale.

The future researchers need to get themselves acquainted with all the emerging developments at the political fronts so that they can comprehend the entire issue at the micro-level and devise comprehensive policies for gender-oriented researchable dimensions. The study will open up new vistas of knowledge for future researchers as writing in extension to the new themes relating to



pathways of women's development will indeed be a significant contribution. This study is also likely to be fruitful in realizing the less privileged middle class educated women the urgency of being politically well-formed.

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accessed on 22.1.2019.)

Notes:

ⁱ Source Election commission of Pakistan official website

ⁱⁱ Data collected from official websites of the National Assembly and the Senate of Pakistan.



ⁱⁱⁱTrue, J., Nicole, G., Niner, S., and Parashar, S. (2014): Women's Political Participation in Asia and the Pacific, in: *Social Science Research Council*, Working Papers on Women in Politics No. 3 (SSRC Conflict Prevention and Peace Forum), 1-70.

^{iv}Source: National Assembly of Pakistan official website

^v“Female legislators contributed to the oversight of the executive branch of government by putting forward 51% of all questions during Question Hours (8,138 out of 16,056 questions). These questions were put forward by 55 female legislators, for an average of 148 questions per woman, whereas 161 male legislators put forward the other 7,918 questions, for an average of 49 questions per man. On average, for every one question to the executive asked by a male parliamentarian, a woman parliamentarian asked three questions. Similarly, female MNAs, either Independently or jointly with other female or male Members, submitted 444 CANs out of 543 in total.” (FAFEN, 2013)