Political Participation of women: Contemporary perspective of Gender and Islam

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Abstract
Political participation is a way to fulfill one’s responsibility to society. Taking part in the political system can vary, from voting in elections, to holding a position as a legislator or a judge, to being a head of state. For each of these roles Islamic history provides models for women. Traditionally politics like business is the “sphere” of men. In politics not only that men are dominating in numbers but also in outlook authoritarian, prohibitory and antagonism. Last few decades has witnessed that political participation has taken different forms in different countries not because of changes in internal political system, but also due to the international situation overall. Since the women organization and feminist groups have become more and more aware of the importance of taking part in the process of decision making to proceed in improving the social condition of women, their participation in politics has demonstrated a substantial amount of imagination and creativity. Here it is to be noted that Allah, has not specified any particular role for all men or all women. There is nothing proposed or supported in The Qur’an a singular role or sole definition of a set of roles, exclusively, for each gender. Hence this let individuals the freewill to decide on their tasks and roles best suited to their circumstances. This off course is possible by maintaining fairness and equality through mutual consultation, compassion, contemplation and empathy between those affected by the decision. This paper intends to discuss and highlight the political participation and female empowerment as well as the historical overview of the role of female participation with gender perspective in Islam as well as women politicians of Pakistan, realities and choices.

Keywords: Islam, women, politics, Pakistan, participation, gender.

Introduction
Social responsibility in Islam is derived from the Qur’anic verse which states:

"And [as for] the believers, both men and women - they are friends and protectors of one another: they [all] enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong." (Qur’an Surah Tauba:71).

The injunction laid down in this verse compels women and men to perform for the progress of society. Hence a person in an individual capacity is encouraged to take active role in society rather than just a passive one. However when we endeavor to assert ourselves as Muslim women we are labeled of being influenced by the West and trying to create division and putting Muslims and Islam to disgrace. Women in the political perspective of Pakistan are not an exceptional case. Although history reveals the major role played by the women in the politics of Pakistan, and have provided leadership on occasion, their level of participation continued to be inadequate.

Women representatives are seen in successive assemblies, but the few that have coped to get there are from a very narrow advantaged section of the society. Nearly majority of them achieve their constituency inherited from family.

Regardless of women political leaders’ role since 1947, the women representation in the assemblies has never reached a double figure. The question here is that why women goes on to be marginalized in the political development, despite the adoption of adult authorization.

They have been 'granted’ 17 per cent seats at the federal and provincial levels and 33 per cent at the local government, but that does not imply they are on the same footing as their male counterparts. They are repeatedly reminded that their freedoms are granted and endowments given to them by the present government.

Islamic Perspective
With the advent of Islam women were given a say in electing their leader. The process through which the leader of an Islamic State is confirmed by the people is known as Bai’ah, which is a symbolic agreement or bond between the leader and the people wherein the leader promises to follow and observe Islamic laws and the people in return, promise their faithfulness towards him. Therefore Bai’ah can be considered the election of the leader as without it the supposed leader has no legitimacy and cannot perform as the head of the state.

Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) received the bai’ah from the people. The Qur’an deals with the issue of women giving the bai’ah to Prophet Muhammad and Allah tells Muhammad (pbuh) to accept the pledge of the women:

"O Prophet! Whenever believing women come unto thee to pledge their allegiance to thee...then accept their pledge of allegiance." (Qur’an Surah al Mumtahana: 12)
In Islam there is no such provision that women cannot participate in politics and hold position. We do not find any verse in the Quran which thwart the women from holding positions of leadership.

Much propagated hadith that the Prophet said, 'A people who entrust power to a woman will never prosper', has been shown to be unreliable on several counts. It is an isolated and unsupported one and therefore not binding in Islamic law, and in addition there is reason to believe it may have been forged in the context of the battle, which A’isha (RAa) the Prophet’s widow led against the fourth Khalifah Ali (RA). In view of the examples set by women rulers in history, it is also clearly flawed and false.

The word imam as used in the Qur’an means a source of guidance (e.g. Qur’an Surah Baqara, 2:124). The connotation is not limited to prayer only. Thus, the leader should have an ability to lead and guide the people along the path of Islam. That is to say, the leader should follow the teachings of Islam in leadership and should act as a role model. Leading prayer is not a obligatory criterion for leadership, although it is symbolically popular. Thus, the assumption that the leader must actually lead the prayer is not actually required.

The Qur'an speaks favorably and positively of the Queen Saba and the way she seek advices from her counselors, who deferred to her good decision on how to deal with the threat of attack by the military of Solomon. She (the Queen Saba) said, 'O chiefs, advise me regarding my situation; I never decide matter until you are in my company.' They said, 'We are carriers of strength and possessors of mighty competence, and the command is your, so consider what you will command.' She said, 'Surely the kings, when they enter a town, ruin it and make the noblest of its people to be low. And surely I am going to send them a present, and to see what (reply) the messengers bring back."

There are no such demands in Islamic laws that refer women to confine themselves to household duties, in contrast we find early Muslim women in all walks of life. The prime example is Hazrat Khadija, the first wife of the Prophet, mother of all his surviving children, was a businesswoman who hired him as an employee, and proposed marriage to him through a third party.

Women were given the responsibility of running the affairs of the State. A woman - Shifa bint 'abd Allah - was appointed controller of the market of Madinah by the Prophet and the Khalifah Umar (RA), not normally known for his broadminded attitude to women, reappointed her, to supervise the market. Hazrat Umar (RA) used to take advice from her. Hazrat Umar (RA) also appointed Hazrat Umm Hakim Baiza, who was the paternal aunt of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) a learned women, at the post of Khalafat.

The criterion for leading prayer is an ability to read the Quran, understanding of the Quran, and knowledge of the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (Hadith, Sahih of Muslim). Hence gender or maleness has nothing to do with this obligation. Moreover, Umm Waraqa, an Ansari woman who was well versed in the Quran, lead her people in prayer (Hadith, Sunan of Abu Dawud); (Munad Ahmed Ibn Hanbal). Quoted from Justice Amir Ali "Following the footsteps of Ummeh Waraqa the Khalifa Walid II of Banu Ummiah sent one of his Kaneez (slave) giving her his turban, to the mosque of Damascus and ordered her to lead in the Juma (Friday) Prayer. At this mosque the ruler had to lead the Juma prayer. This incident happened in the history of Damascus yet no Objection from anyquarter; any jurist has come into light or reported in the history. Hundreds and thousands of the male at that time listened the Khutbah (sermon) from the woman and followed her in the prayer. In addition to Umm Waraqa leading her family in prayer, a woman named Ghazala, in the 7th century A.D., led Muslim men and women in prayer. Not only did she lead Muslim men in prayer, she recited the two longest chapters in the Quran during that prayer (many traditional imams do not accept Ghazala as legitimate precedent because she belonged to the Khawarij school; however, this does not necessarily invalidate her actions. Women can be a head of the state according to the Imam Malik, Imam Tibri and Imam Abu Hanifa."

Women’s views were often listened to, respected, and generally supported, by the Prophet as can be reported in the Hadith literature. At the time of Treaty of Hudaybia when the Makkans who made an agreement with him that he and the Muslims could return the following year stopped the Prophet’s pilgrimage to Makkah. He told the people to shave their heads and offer their sacrifices where they were, but they were reluctant to obey, so he asked his wife Umm Salmah, and she advised him to lead them by doing so himself. He took her advice, and it worked.

"Hazrat Ayesha (RAa), the first woman leader of Islam was a teacher of both men and women. In turn her students, both gender taught others how to govern, how to organize Muslim communities, and how to arrange Muslim family and social life. The great scholars of hadith got their learning from Ayesha. The Noble Prophet bore witness to Hazrat Ayesha’s intellect, thoughtfulness, and rational approach to life. At a time of crisis she had no hesitation in taking over command of the Islamic army and directing it in the field of battle. During peace time she gave religious rulings and helped the most learned of the Companions of the Prophet to make a distinction between the right and the wrong. All the Fiqh and Laws of Islam are related to Hazrat Ayesha. It is about time that Muslims started remembering Hazrat Ayesha.

Women parliamentarian in Pakistan

The feminization of power requires beyond electing more women to public sector. What one solicited not that the candidate is a woman, but rather if she is pro-women. If we focus on electing just women, we may end up recruiting more women in office but not having voice for women and doing same business-as-usual politics, which is of no use to the women of our country.

After a great worldwide struggle, women managed to win the right to vote but their expectation that it would inevitable lead to widely women’s representation was not met. Instead, women have to go on board on another extensive and tough struggle to get women representation in parliament. Major part of this struggle was convincing and motivating women voters to support women candidate as their representatives. Almost in every country around the globe the typical channels of access to national legislatures is centered on political parties. Unfortunately when women

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entered parliament, their struggle becomes far from over as in parliament they enter the male dominated sphere as it was long established, organized, run by men working for their vested interest and launch procedures for their own convenience although there was no intentional or planned conspiracy against women to exclude or prohibit them

**Women in Parliaments**

There was no deliberate conspiracy to exclude women. It was not even an issue. Most long-established parliaments were a product of political processes that were male-dominated or exclusively male. Subsequent legislatures were, for the most part, modeled on these established assemblies. Inevitably, these male dominated legislatures reflect certain male biases, the precise kind varying by country and culture. Until recently, this "institutional masculinity" has been an invisible characteristic of legislatures; it was embedded, pervasive and taken for granted. Only recently have legislatures' masculine biases come under scrutiny. Indeed, in most countries, the political role of women in legislatures has become a public issue only in the second half of the twentieth century.

Today, women constitute 11.7 per cent of legislative members worldwide. In the Nordic countries, their numbers are highest at 36.4 per cent, while in the Arab States their representation is only 3.3 per cent. Only 14.1 percent of representatives elected to Parliaments around the world are women, up from 11.7 in 1997. The percentage of female cabinet ministers worldwide has risen from 3 in 1987 to 6.2 percent in 1996. In early 1995, Sweden formed the world's first cabinet to have equal numbers of men and women. Of the 189 highest-ranking diplomats to the United Nations, only eleven are women. Almost no women served on the military staff of UN peacekeeping between 1957 and 1979. In 1993, 2 percent of the military contingents of peacekeeping were women. Throughout the history of UN peacekeeping, there have been only 2 women in top decision-making positions.

Women constitute half of the citizens in this country. Opportunities for women to be represented in political bodies and to influence political matters are an important parameter of democracy and thus an integral aspect of political development and the democratization process. Increasing the active participation of women in politics and the representation of women in positions of power remains a crucial step towards obtaining a gender balance in politics. One area in which women have gained very little access is the absence of women in key positions.

The father of nation Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah who fought the case of a separate state on the basis of Islam strongly encouraged and supported women participation in politics. Fatima Jinnah the sister of Quaid who remained a right hand for him also participated in politics during Pakistan movement and after the establishment of Pakistan as well.

He is on record for saying that the emancipation of Muslim men is not possible unless Muslim women are involved in this struggle as equal partners. When the movement for creation of Pakistan gathered momentum, Muslim women came out on the streets and were active in the demonstrations and agitations that took place for independence.

In 1940 Mr. Jinnah announced, "Women are supposed to create a sense of general political consciousness. They should stand shoulder to shoulder with men in practical politics."

In 1948, in the immediate aftermath of Independence, two very determined lady members of Pakistan's Constituent Assembly, Begum Shaista Ikram Ullah and Begum Jahan Ara Shahnawaz, managed to achieve a phenomenal level of political success for the women of Pakistan. Through dedicated and focused hard work, they succeeded in getting the Muslim Personal Law of Shariah passed under which women were granted the right to inherit property, including agricultural land.

Ironically, in the history of Pakistan, never ever a single woman represented as a chief minister of any of the four provinces. Once the woman hold the position of the governor of Sindh i.e. Begum Rana Liaqat Ali Khan but after that this position is also a forbidden fruit for women. Women are granted ministries of education, social welfare, law and population or other less important departments. The other ministries or crucial sectors like industries, economics and finance, health, excise and taxation, foreign and interior, home ministries, defence, communication, media, etc are still a nightmare for women parliamentarians.

The martial power of preceding Head Musharraf has gave extreme adjustments in women’s opportunity to governmental participation in Pakistan above the last three years, chiefly across the introduction of quota systems. After the new innate power arrangement was gave in Pakistan in August 2001, thousands of women had been elected to the innate bodies fine art grass origin level across the 33% kept chairs quota for women. As PPP in their last administration conceded the vital portfolio of the nationwide encounter talker to the woman and additionally the vital and prohibited department of external matters was given to the woman in PPP regime. But so distant the post of Chief Justice in the Elevated or Dominant Court is yet prohibited fruit for Pakistani woman.

In South Asia, the maximum number of female leaders has emerged. Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan, Indira Gandhi of India, Khalida Zia and Hasina Wajid of Bangladesh and Sirivamo Bandranaiuka and Chandrika Kumaratunga of Sri Lanka are some of the more prominent among them. The general level of political participation among South Asian women does not reflect a similar trend. Political participation is often limited by constraints laid on their mobility and roles based on the socio-cultural perceptions. South Asia has been slow in political empowerment and representation of its women (Rustagi, 2004).

**Conclusion**

It is widely believed that increasing the number of women in decision-making positions will lead to positive changes for women and society. However, even though women can run for office in most countries, their presence in government is still very low.

Consider the following:

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Only 24 women have been elected heads of state or government in this century. In 1995 there were 10 women heads of state. Although women’s representation at the highest level of government is generally weakest in Asia, four of these 10 held office in this region.

Although women remain significantly under-represented in today’s parliaments, women are now looking beyond the numbers to focus on what they can actually do while in parliament how they can make an impact, whatever their numbers may be. They are learning the rules of the game, and using this knowledge and understanding to promote women’s issues and concerns from inside the world’s legislatures. In so doing, they are not only increasing the chances of their own success, but are also paving the way for a new generation of women to enter the legislative process. How can women maximize their impact on the political process through parliament? What strategies are most useful in increasing their effectiveness? What lessons can women MPs share with those aspiring to enter the field? In what ways have women impacted on political processes? The actual impact women parliamentarians can make will depend on a number of variables, including the political context in which the assembly functions, the type and number of women who are in parliament, and the rules of the parliamentary game. Women need to be about the transformation of politics as it is currently organized, to take politics over in our own image and our own voice.

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