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## POLITICS WITHOUT WOMEN: PAKISTAN'S MISSING VOICES

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### Abstract:

Increased decision-making power guaranteed women their human rights and equal participation with men in governance, as well as provides greater opportunities to influence matters that affect their lives within the community at large. Political empowerment is vital for achieving inclusive and effective equality, justice and rule of law. Though significant progress has been seen in some parts of the world, however, in developing countries women participation in the political sphere and in decision making institutions remains low. As in the case of Pakistan women are facing socio-cultural, economic, and religious hindrances, make their participation difficult in the political arena. This qualitative empirical study explores the victimization of women in political sphere in a highly gender-segregated society where women have disproportionate social status in a patriarchal culture and feudo-democracy. Besides, in Malaysia, female political representation has slowly shown progress as women are advancing towards roles of leadership. This study observed that to strengthen womenfolk's stature, the government should protect the rights of women in all spheres of life. The most important phenomenon is that, it is political empowerment which motivates and mobilizes women to struggle for their rights in all terms whether moral, economical, legal or social

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etc. Once women are given the power of decision making in their lives, the process of empowerment will be started.

### Introduction:

Women are disadvantaged in every single country in the world except in few countries where gender gap is not substantial i.e. in some developed countries, Western Europe, North America, and Scandinavia and of some Far East countries. Particularly in developing countries women are not given the stature which is claimed by the law.<sup>5</sup> In South Asian context, the politics existed in an extreme nature, often prevents womenfolk from taking part in the political arena. Politics has customarily escalated man's position and prohibited women engagement.<sup>6</sup> In the same vein, women found themselves in a disadvantaged position in Pakistan's national political arena explicitly unequal political positions to men.<sup>7</sup> According to Asma Jahangir, the partnership of the feudal and elites with religious orthodoxy and the military establishment has made any progress towards human rights almost impossible. Together they control all state institutions.<sup>8</sup> In Pakistan, since the independence in 1947, the situation of women's active participation in politics remained unsatisfactory.<sup>9</sup> Patriarchy silenced the women voices and culture of the political parties still does not consider women appropriate for politics.<sup>10</sup> Literature on political participation of women shows a very small number of women involvement as law makers,<sup>11</sup> though, the Constitution of Pakistan places no restriction on women's participation in politics, no law prevent women from voting, in reality, however, their presence in the politics at local, provincial, and national levels remains insignificant due to the cultural, traditional and structural barriers that impeded women.<sup>12</sup> Socio-cultural hindrances in Pakistani society discourages women to participate in the political sphere on the other. Pakistan is ranked 134th (out of 135 countries) despite efforts from international community, and the worst places for women to be a part of the political process.<sup>13</sup> The most important phenomenon is that, it is political empowerment which motivates and mobilises women to struggle for their rights in all terms whether moral, legal or social etc. Though, founder of Pakistan Mr. Jinnah a very great proponent of women's active participation in politics, has said "No nation can rise to the height of glory

<sup>5</sup> Saud, Muhammad. (2019). Political participation of women in Pakistan: A study of Punjab. 32. 114-122;

<sup>6</sup> SAP International (2007) *Unfolding the realities: Silenced Voices of Women in Politics* ed. Nepali, Rohit Kumar, Shrestha Prakash, Kathmandu: SAP International, in UN Women, *Violence Against Women in Politics*, a study conducted in India, Nepal, and Pakistan, 2014, Online, URL: < <http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2014/violence%20against%20women%20in%20politics-report.pdf?la=en&vs=4441> > retrieved on 20 August 2020.

<sup>7</sup> Weiss, Anita M. *Moving forward with the legal empowerment of women in Pakistan*. US Institute of Peace, 2012.

<sup>8</sup> Jahangir A. (2000) *Human Rights in Pakistan: A System in the Making*. In: Power S., Allison G. (eds) *Realizing Human Rights*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York

<sup>9</sup> Umer Khayyam and Fariha Tahir, *Female Political Power and the Complexity of Social Barriers in Pakistan*, *Nust Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* Vol.5 No.2 (July-December 2019) pp. 153-175

<sup>10</sup> Akhlaq Ahmada and Haq Nawaz Anwar, *Femininity and Women Political Participation in Pakistan* *The Pakistan Journal of Social Issues*, 73-84 Volume VIII (2017)

<sup>11</sup> Ayesha Mumtaz; Qian Hongdao; Hamid Mukhtar; Hafiz Abdul Rahman Saleem, *Discrimination in Nationality Laws: A Case Study of Pakistan*, 66 *J.L. Pol'y & Globalization* 154 (2017).

<sup>12</sup> United Kingdom: Home Office, *Country of Origin Information Report - Pakistan*, 7 December 2012, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/50c1d3a52.html> [accessed 9 March 2020]; see also Dr. Farzana Bari. *Women in Pakistan: Country briefing paper*. Asian Development Bank, 2000. Online, URL: <<https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/32562/women-pakistan.pdf>> retrieved on 16 December 2020.

<sup>13</sup> Umer Khayyam and Fariha Tahir, *Female Political Power and the Complexity of Social Barriers in Pakistan*, *Nust Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* Vol.5 No.2 (July-December 2019) pp. 153-175

unless women are side by side with men”<sup>14</sup>As affirmed by Dr. Masooma Hasan, without empowering women politically one cannot give them even a single right.<sup>15</sup>

Political empowerment requires inclusion of men and women equally in democratic decision-making process. Political empowerment for women includes women’s participation in appointed bodies. It is believed that it is political empowerment that led women to equality, equal status and rights. The same power can be translated into participation in democratic politics in the community level.<sup>16</sup> This participation not confined to involve in political process, voting and election but to hold public office and it goes to decision making or in ministerial positions as well as in law making and in governmental bodies. Empowerment means the young generation have some rights, right to social mobility, freedom of choice to their spouses, education, and taking jobs and to allow them to participate in politics and other public affairs.

### **Method:**

This article set to ascertain the range of violence against women in political sphere within Pakistani context where women have disproportionate social status in a patriarchal political culture. This research adopted qualitative research methodology and method. It includes in-depth interviewing with key informants who are experts in study at hand and they may have encountered through their work or acquaintances, experience in the field of women’s rights, i.e. sociologists, political scientists and from gender studies. Data is gathered primarily through open-ended interviews with 10 participants. This qualitative study provides a detailed, comprehensive understanding of the subject matter and it produces experts’ perspectives, knowledge thoughts, reasoning, feelings, motivations and beliefs regarding the meanings and their subjective views and shed light on different socio-cultural, religious, legal aspects of women subordination. The intention was to provide an all-inclusive view of a social phenomenon. The analysis of all the information gathered and reviewed and compare with literature review. Findings are then interpreted and presented in a manner that explores possible practical solutions or feasible remedies.

This paper also attempts to compare and discuss briefly on the position of women political involvement from the Malaysian perspective. Analyses were made to understand the progress of women and their legal status according to Malaysian constitutional law.

### **Facts and understanding the nature and extent of VAW in Politics:**

Disapproving women participation into political arena is a form of violence against women.<sup>17</sup> Barring women’s right to vote during elections went unchallenged by the political parties and the Election Commission of Pakistan. Absence of women’s representation in political processes and male Lack of women’s participation in formal political processes are

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Dr. Masooma Hasan, Chairperson Pakistan Institute of International Affairs, President Board of Governors, Aurat Foundation, Pakistan, Interview by thesis writer, file is with author.

<sup>16</sup> Akram Zaheer Shafiq Jabeen, 2014, Political empowerment of women and their participation in legislation. A case study of Pakistan 2000-2013, Munich, GRIN Verlag, <https://www.grin.com/document/341908>, retrieved on 16 December 2020.

<sup>17</sup> National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) 2015. Standardized Indicators on Violence against Women in Pakistan. Islamabad, Pakistan; FAFEN defines political violence as “any act or threat of violence – be it physical or psychological, explicit or implicit – that is aimed at any person or property involved in the political process.” This includes violence that targets state institutions or infrastructure; violence motivated by ethnic, religious, tribal, ideological, or other identities; violence based on organizational or professional affiliation; and violence based on political party affiliation.” Please refer Free and Fair Election Network database via URL: <<http://fafen.org/political-electoral-violence/>> retrieved on 17 December 2020.

underlying contributed by the male domination in political parties. Purdah and segregation, cultural, feudal and tribal structures also restrict women to join political arena.<sup>18</sup> However, nepotism and favoritism instead of qualifications or gender is widespread and the political parties award these reserved seats due to the system of indirect elections.<sup>19</sup>

The Constitution of Pakistan ensures full participation of women in all spheres of national life as per Article 34 of the Constitution. According to FAFEN, it is shocking to observe that as many as 12.41 million women are missing from electoral rolls nationwide.<sup>20</sup> The contributing factors of that gender gap in the electoral rolls are socio-cultural and religious barriers, the limited registration capacity of national registration authority, lack of awareness among citizens, and law and order situation and so on.<sup>21</sup> Due to this huge gender gap, the unregistered women cannot claim their rights and being out of electoral realm resultantly excludes them from making decisions that affect their lives. Citizen's voice and participation is often mediated through considering low status of women in Pakistan, stereotypical division of work, misconception of the teachings of Islam, prevalence of nationalists and ethnic beliefs, are also the causes of the less number of women legislators.<sup>22</sup>

The women's representation is insignificant until the year 2000-2001 when General Pervaiz Musharraf secured power and introduced 33% seats of women at local level in districts, tehsils / towns and union councils. This event considered remarkable in the Pakistani history of women participation, mooting about 100,000 women into politics across Pakistan, praised by the international community and women rights champions who highly appreciated these steps by a military person.<sup>23</sup> The fact matter is that after the Musharraf's era and after the promulgation of 18th Amendment in the year 2010 in the Constitution of Pakistan the local government system went under the jurisdiction of the provinces. In Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces, within their local government system the quota for female representatives was reduced to 15 and 22 percent respectively.<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, the current representation of women in the Parliament only possible through reservation of 17% quota.

<sup>18</sup> Dr. Farzana Bari. Women in Pakistan: Country briefing paper. Asian Development Bank, 2000. Online, URL: <<https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/32562/women-pakistan.pdf>> retrieved on 16 December 2020.

<sup>19</sup> Fizza Batool, FEMALE REPRESENTATION IN THE PARLIAMENT: WHAT PAKISTAN CAN LEARN FROM INDIA, IN SOUTH ASIAN VOICES, July 12, 2019 [ONLINE] <https://southasianvoices.org/female-representation-in-the-parliament-what-pakistan-can-learn-from-india/> retrieved on 23 November, 2019

<sup>20</sup> Please refer Free and Fair Election Network database accessed on 11 May, 2021; see also, USAID, Citizen's Voice Project, Annual Report FY 17, Islamabad, [online], URL, <[http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/PA00N3T7.pdf](http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00N3T7.pdf)> retrieved on 17 December 2020.

<sup>21</sup> Please refer Free and Fair Election Network database via URL: <<http://fafen.org/political-electoral-violence/>> retrieved on 17 Decemehr 2020.

<sup>22</sup> Ayesha Mumtaz; Qian Hongdao; Hamid Mukhtar; Hafiz Adbul Rahman Saleem, Discrimination in Nationality Laws: A Case Study of Pakistan, 66 J.L. Pol'y & Globalization 154 (2017).

<sup>23</sup> Syed, F. Z., & Dar, H. M. (2017). Women Political Participation in Pakistan: Steps towards Reshaping the Political Environment. Orient Research Journal of Social Sciences (ORJSS), 2(2); see also, Umer Khayyam and Fariha Tahir, Female Political Power and the Complexity of Social Barriers in Pakistan, Nust Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Vol.5 No.2 (July-December 2019) pp. 153-175

<sup>24</sup> Fizza Batool, FEMALE REPRESENTATION IN THE PARLIAMENT: WHAT PAKISTAN CAN LEARN FROM INDIA, IN SOUTH ASIAN VOICES, July 12, 2019 [ONLINE] <https://southasianvoices.org/female-representation-in-the-parliament-what-pakistan-can-learn-from-india/> retrieved on 23 November, 2020; see also, Syed, F. Z., & Dar, H. M. (2017). Women Political Participation in Pakistan: Steps towards Reshaping the Political Environment. Orient Research Journal of Social Sciences (ORJSS), 2(2).

In addition, women usually not assigned to the essential positions within party's central executive committees with the exception of their women's wing. Women's participation in the central executive committees of the vital political parties is very insignificant. The level of representation of women within their political parties, and the space for them to participate in national affairs at the same level with their male colleagues remains uncertain.<sup>25</sup> Few leading women politicians in the history of Pakistan, i.e., Miss. Fatima Jinnah, Ms. Benazir Bhutto, Ms. Maryam Nawaz Shareef, Mrs. Nasreen Jalil, Mrs. Nafisa Shah, Ms. Hina Rabbani Khar, Mrs. Fehmida Mirza, Mrs. Faryal Talpur, and Mrs. Nasim Wali Khan, who have prominent posts in their political parties as well as in government, however, all of them inherited their political career from their own families, fathers / husbands and became politicians in their own right. The insignificant representation of women at all political levels reflects the inadequacy of commitment from the political parties. There has been increasing embarrassment among women activists and women's rights organisations over the nature of politics in the country.

### **The Motive behind the Political Violence:**

Violence against women in politics is used to strengthen traditional, social and political structures by targeting women politicians and activists who challenged patriarchy and the prevailing social and cultural norms. It limits women's movement and capacity to participate within the political sphere.<sup>26</sup> There are some parts in the country where women are not allowed to even cast their vote due to the prevailing strict and traditional culture. Here also such conservative places where women are hindered from contributing any healthy activities under the pretext of religion. Though, it is the orthodox cultural version of Islam which is absolutely wrong.<sup>27</sup> It is fact that hardly men accepting women roll in all walks of life. All political parties have lack of merit and lack of governance. During military dictator Ayub Khan's era, he used religion to oppose candidature of Miss. Fatima Jinnah who was contesting presidential elections in the year 1964 against him by raising the issue that women cannot become a ruler in an Islamic ideological state.<sup>28</sup> Until recently, fatwas have issued against women's participation in national elections even against casting of vote by women which occurred in some areas of the country. Occasionally, the Pakistani politicians faced criticism when Pakistan's political leadership across the party spectrum given their endorsement of, or at least silence about these fatwas even candidates and leading members of progressive parties underwriting of the fatwa for undemocratic move to prohibit women from exercising their right to vote.<sup>29</sup> Due to moral justifications, and culturally mixed religious interpretations,

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<sup>25</sup>Zia, Maliha, and Rifat Butt. "Pakistan NGO alternative Report on CEDAW." Aurat Foundation, [http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/docs/ngos/AuratFoundationPakistanForTheSession\\_CEDAW54.pdf](http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/docs/ngos/AuratFoundationPakistanForTheSession_CEDAW54.pdf) (2012), 95.

<sup>26</sup> SAP International (2007) *Unfolding the realities: Silenced Voices of Women in Politics* ed. Nepali, Rohit Kumar, Shrestha Prakash, Kathmandu: SAP International, in UN Women, *Violence Against Women in Politics*, a study conducted in India, Nepal, and Pakistan, 2014, Online, URL: < <http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2014/violence%20against%20women%20in%20politics-report.pdf?la=en&vs=4441> > retrieved on 20 August 2020.

<sup>27</sup>Mr. Mohammad Ali, President, Roshni Research & Development Welfare Organization, Karachi, Pakistan, Interview by thesis writer, file is with author.

<sup>28</sup>Khan, Saqib, and Umbreen Javaid. "Extremism in Contemporary Pakistan: Threats, Causes and Future Policy." *South Asian Studies* 31, no. 2 (2016): 7.

<sup>29</sup>Fleschenberg, Andrea. "Reflecting Women and Politics in Pakistan-Regional Perspectives." *Scrutiny* 5 (2011): 53; see also, United Kingdom: Home Office, *Country of Origin Information Report - Pakistan*, 7 December 2012, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/50c1d3a52.html> [accessed 9 March 2020].

having feminine identity, and gendered division of labour and lack of skills were presented to justify that women may not become political leader (s).<sup>30</sup>

### **The Effects of Political Violence against Pakistani Women:**

Women are still helpless and deprived of decision making in Pakistan as well as in many developing countries. Even if they are educated still, they are ignored in any kind of decision making. Women of Pakistan are continually struggling demand of security of life, justice, economic and social rights, and political freedoms. A leading sociologist and Vice Chancellor University of Sindh Prof. Fateh Muhammad Burfet contended:

“Pakistan’s political leadership has never been able to deliver its promises of promoting these rights.”<sup>31</sup>

Those in power and their allies have mastered the art of maintaining the status quo, deviation from which is extremely threatening to their economic and social interests.<sup>32</sup> Mrs. Nighat Shakeel, former MP stated during her interview with the author highlighted:

“All the women in parliaments have some certain limit that which they cannot cross, because majority of parliamentarians come through quota, because of that they are not front benchers of the political parties.”<sup>33</sup>

In a patriarchal society where man have preference in every aspect of life, the male ministers also have taken advantage in this regard too. They have male centered approaches, they need budget for the public issues i.e. roads, buildings, electricity, irrigation and agriculture related projects, and they find enough support for their schemes and taken lion’s share of the budget. On the other hand, being women, they need hospitals for caring mothers and children, they need nutrition, women vocational centers, however, and unfortunately, they haven’t been heard. Because women parliamentarians are not in a position of decision making, and no access to the very people of bureaucracy so couldn’t perform well. Take an example for Sindh province, there are three women in cabinet, the problem is that only one of them is a full minister like other male ministers, however the other two only appointed on the capacity of advisor and special assistant, having no power of budgeting and influencing policies. Due to the patriarchal mindset of male ministers and the male dominated bureaucracy, they also won’t help these women representatives and not taking them seriously.<sup>34</sup> One women minister has stresses:

<sup>30</sup> Akhlaq Ahmad and Haq Nawaz Anwar, *Femininity and Women Political Participation in Pakistan* The Pakistan Journal of Social Issues, 73-84 Volume VIII (2017)

<sup>31</sup> Prof. Dr. Fateh Muhammad Burfet, Vice Chancellor University of Sindh at Jamshoro, Pakistan, Interview by thesis writer, file is with author.

<sup>32</sup> Jahangir A. (2000) *Human Rights in Pakistan: A System in the Making*. In: Power S., Allison G. (eds) *Realizing Human Rights*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York

<sup>33</sup> Nighat Shakeel, Member National Assembly of Pakistan, Mrs. Heer Soho, Member Provincial Assembly of Sindh, Karachi, Pakistan, Interviewed by the author.

<sup>34</sup> Mahnaz Rahman, Resident Director Aurat Foundation, Sindh Pakistan, Interview by Interviewed by the author; Nighat Shakeel, Member National Assembly of Pakistan, Mrs. Heer Soho, Member Provincial Assembly of Sindh, Karachi, Pakistan Interviewed by the author; see Ayesha Mumtaz; Qian Hongdao; Hamid Mukhtar; Hafiz Abdul Rahman Saleem, *Discrimination in Nationality Laws: A Case Study of Pakistan*, 66 J.L. Pol’y & Globalization 154 (2017); see also, Rehana Legari Advocate, Deputy Speaker Sindh Assembly, and former Special Assistant to Chief Minister Sindh for Human Rights, Govt. of Sindh Karachi, Pakistan Interviewed by the author.

“I would say our voice must be heard. If I am representing 50 percent of female population then they should give me a budget for 50 percent, though my voice is weak at the moment, it is hoped that in future if democracy prevails then my voice will be heard.”<sup>35</sup>

Women are also suffering most from the insurgency lasts for decades in Khyber-Pukhtunkhwa, in Baluchistan, and in Karachi. There is missing person issue in different parts of the country too. Women parliamentarians have no role in peace keeping because they are not allowed by their political parties' even governments. If 70 thousand people killed during 'war on terror' in a decade then ultimately women are the principle victims. Women cannot fight for their rights in presence of anarchy.<sup>36</sup> The history of martial law also has an issue. Women activists encountered in a situation of socio-economic and political marginalisation once a political regime change due to a period of martial law. They became excluded or sidelined from meaningful and conclusive political participation. Moreover, this exclusion from democratic participation is challenged given women's contributions to initiate and accomplish processes of democratic political change, even when threatened, imprisoned or encountering other forms of political violence and persecution due to their activism.<sup>37</sup>

### **Comparative Analysis with Malaysian Position:**

Women play an essential in the society. In Malaysia, there are several legislations enacted which impacts upon women's role and rights. Equal opportunities are given to men and women such as to ensure the balance from all aspects for the development of the nation. The Federal Constitution of Malaysia, which came into force in 1957, is the supreme law of Malaysia (Article 4 Federal Constitution).<sup>38</sup> Being the supreme law of the country, it defines the base of the citizens right of the country. It aims to hold together the citizen in the confederation to maintain peace and harmony.

Article 8(1) of the Federal Constitution of Malaysia states as follows:

"All persons are equal before the law and entitled to the equal protections of the law".

Article 8(2) further provides that:

Except as expressly authorised by this Constitution, there shall be no discrimination against citizens on the grounds only of religion, race, descent, place of birth or gender in any law or in the appointment to any office or employment under a public authority or in the administration of any law relating to the acquisition, holding or dispositions of property or the establishing or carrying on of any trade, business, profession, vocation or employment.

Hence, any form of discrimination in relation to gender is forbidden under the Federal Constitution of Malaysia. Malaysia had also ratified the United Nations Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) on 5 July 1995. By being a signatory to this international convention, Malaysia has ensured and take on the authority to secure and protects the rights of the women. As such, Malaysia must ensure and prohibit any form of discrimination and unfairness against women in the society.

<sup>35</sup>Rehana Legari Advocate, Deputy Speaker Sindh Assembly, and former Special Assistant to Chief Minister Sindh for Human Rights, Govt. of SindhKarachi, Pakistan, Interviewed by the author.

<sup>36</sup>Nighat Shakeel, Member National Assembly of Pakistan, Mrs. Heer Soho, Member Provincial Assembly of Sindh, Karachi,Pakistan, Interviewed by the author.

<sup>37</sup>Fleschenberg, Andrea. "Reflecting Women and Politics in Pakistan-Regional Perspectives." *Scrutiny* 5 (2011): 53;

<sup>38</sup> Federal Constitution of Malaysia

The Sustainable Development Goals 2030 (SDG) is a good step forward for equality and development of women globally. The Gender Equality Bill is also in the process of being drafted by the government to protect women from discrimination. Rights and Gender Equality Select Committee together with several NGOs guarantees that women are impartially treated in the society and obtain equal opportunity.<sup>39</sup>

As of 2019, Malaysia stands at 143rd out of 190 countries on women's representation in national parliament, according to Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and as such in ASEAN, Malaysia stands third from the bottom, above Myanmar and Brunei; notably, Malaysia has been one of the longest stable democracies with regular parliamentary elections in ASEAN.<sup>40</sup>

Women's participation in politics in Malaysia has indeed been a sedate advancement. A very minimum number of female involvement (only 43 out of the 447 candidates) were seen in the recent Sabah state election.<sup>41</sup> Even, the 2019 statistics showed 24.7 as professional and technical workers were women as compared to men who were 44.3 per cent.<sup>42</sup> Number representing women participation may still remain quite small but has been apparent in Malaysia. In a research conducted by Mustafa revealed that prior to standing for election, most women held important posts under the women's wings of the political party.<sup>43</sup>

Women political participation is essentially necessary in order to ensure the progress and advancement of women in the nation. Most political parties have started off with some accession move to escalate the number of female candidates in the general elections and appointed offices.<sup>44</sup> Malaysia's delineation of women as assembly member remains one of the lowest in comparison to other Southeast Asian and global parliamentary democracies but however, when contextualized against Malaysia's politics of divides and dissent starting from 1999 onward, there are some newer characteristics of women's involvement in formal politics.<sup>45</sup> Any form of violence against women is an infringement of their human rights and curtailment of women's advancement. It is important to close the gender gap and include the involvement of both men and women in every aspect of the nation development

## Discussion:

Pakistani women have extremely limited opportunities to decide how to live their own lives. In the same way they particularly have very limited powers of decision-making regarding attainment of higher education.<sup>46</sup> Traditionally, female role is generally subordination to the

<sup>39</sup> The Star (26 October, 2020). Women in Malaysian politics: Are politicians missing a point?

<https://www.thestar.com.my/opinion/letters/2020/10/26/women-in-malaysian-politics-are-politicians-missing-a-point>

<sup>40</sup> Sukhani, P. R. (2020) Women's Political Representation: Progressing in Malaysia? Commentary by S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore.

<sup>41</sup> Free Malaysia Today (FMT) (17 August, 2020) Sabah elections on Sept 26

<https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2020/08/17/sabah-election-on-sept-26/>

<sup>42</sup> The Star (21 October, 2020) Women in Malaysian politics: Are politicians missing a point?

<https://www.malaymail.com/news/what-you-think/2020/10/21/women-in-malaysian-politics-are-politicians-missing-a-point-yanitha-meena-l/1914822>

<sup>43</sup> Mahfudzah binti Mustafa (1999) Women's Political Participation in Malaysia: The Non-Bumiputra's Perspective, *Asian Journal of Women's Studies*, 5:2, 9-46, DOI: 10.1080/12259276.1999.11665847

<sup>44</sup> Ministry of Women and Family Development, *The Progress of Malaysian Women Since Independence 1957 – 2000*, Support from United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei Darussalam, September 2003.

<sup>45</sup> Maznah Mohamad (2018) Getting More Women into Politics under One-Party Dominance: Collaboration, Clientelism, and Coalition Building in the Determination of Women's Representation in Malaysia, *Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 3, p. 415-447. DOI: 10.20495/seas.7.3\_415

<sup>46</sup> Svanemyr, Joar, Qadeer Baig, and Venkatraman Chandra-Mouli. "Scaling up of Life Skills Based Education in Pakistan: a case study." *Sex Education* 15, no. 3 (2015): 249-262; see also, Zubair, S., 2016. Development



male, determined by the forces of patriarchy across classes, regions, and the rural/urban divide, so they were confined to the four walls of the home and have a role of childbearing and rearing, love and care for the husband and the elderly, submissiveness, homemaking, passivity, and dependence, curtailing their freedoms and their basic rights. They have only private role and a normative space to operate. Besides, lack of political decision making by women also cause of low societal standing, segregation and discrimination in every aspect of lives also made the situation worse. <sup>47</sup>Comparatively, women in Malaysia have played an essential participated into the evolution of the nation widely. No doubt there are room for improvement, health and education rights of women have considerably improved. <sup>48</sup>

Conversely, within Pakistani society, men are characterized by an independent being, having decision making powers in public and private lives, responsible for making means, assertive, violent, and wider interaction. <sup>49</sup>This system gives women a tokenish position in political system. Through decades of systematic misogyny and internalized chauvinism, lack of accountability for women rights abusers and misuse of religious pretext to guide one's own motive, women have been pushed to the corner for too long. State should strengthen and enhance women's political participation and make sure their presence at the local and national levels.

The above mention evaluations confirm that the existing rotation of violence against women is fueled by gender discrimination and patriarchy. The institution of Patriarchy combines with morality, culturally mixed religious thoughts to justify its existence and perpetuation. This enquiry also indicates that orthodox cultural interpretations of religion, and its interconnection with social divisions and power relations, cannot be ignored when understanding political violence which have negative impact on the status of women in Pakistan. A wide gap between women and women's socio-economic and political status was observed. Women's exclusion from politics is one of the results of this culture of patriarchy. Owing to patriarchal mindset, women are frequently sidelined in politics. Despite all the talks on breaking gender barriers, women are often debilitated and cast away from the political arena.

The Pakistani women's movement are playing an important role in raising women's political consciousness, agitating for social and legal reform, and convincing both women and men that equality between individuals of all classes and both sexes are necessary condition for sustainable development. <sup>50</sup> The relationship between the women's movement and the Pakistani state has undergone significant shifts, from mutual accommodation and a complementary spirit to confrontation and conflict, followed by collaboration and cooperation finally, collusion depending upon transformations in the nature of the state at particular moments in history. <sup>51</sup> In the post 1988 era, the arena for social movement activism shifted from the streets to the courts and other state institutions. The new parameters of

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narratives, media and women in Pakistan: shifts and continuities. *South Asian Popular Culture*, 14(1-2), pp.19-32; see also Shaukat, Sadia at n. 330.

<sup>47</sup> Umer Khayyam and Fariha Tahir, *Female Political Power and the Complexity of Social Barriers in Pakistan*, *NUST JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES* Vol.5 No.2 (July-December 2019) pp. 153-175

<sup>48</sup> Aminah Ahmad, (1999) *Country Briefing Paper Women in Malaysia*.

<https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/32552/women-malaysia.pdf>

<sup>49</sup> Saud, Muhammad. (2019). *Political participation of women in Pakistan: A study of Punjab*. 32. 114-122.

<sup>50</sup> Kennedy, Charles H., ed. *Pakistan at the Millennium*. (USA: Oxford University Press, 2003), 159.

<sup>51</sup> Saigol, Rubina, Dr., *Feminism and the Women's Movement in Pakistan, Actors, Debates and Strategies*, March 2016 Islamabad: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Asia, URL: <<http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/pakistan/12453.pdf>> retrieved on 23 February 2020.

governance required different skills to lobby effectively for legislative change and improved policies. The women's movement continues to negotiate women's interests with the state and society, and has become increasingly effective over time, strengthened by regional and international recognition of its work. Although, the woman question in Pakistan is that the state is seen as a contributor to the oppression of women, unlike the early years of Pakistan when the expectation of the state and judiciary was of ultimate fairness. It is necessary for women to understand that their issues are not isolated from those of other segments of society, so this understanding can be created only if they are willing to engage in serious dialogue and action with other groups.

The prevalent corruption in politics acknowledged women campaigners that as per Dr. Farzan Bari,

“If women of Pakistan want to see any fundamental change in their lives, they must practically be present in political decision-making bodies and directly participate in political processes.”<sup>52</sup>

Research has shown that even women who have selected on reserved (quota) seats are among the most active in the Provincial and National Assemblies and in the Senate. These women challenged social and cultural norms and introduced legislations on domestic violence, anti-women and other discriminatory practices, and several other Bills pertaining to women's rights. Women legislators have played their role on other range of issues on country affairs as well. Coping with those ongoing threats, of violence and discriminatory practices, Pakistani women are actively working to assert their rights and develop strategies to counter the spread of violence, discrimination, and modern-day extremism. Dr. Masooma Hasan while pointing out in following:

“Not all men are cruel and biased, our overall society is not so conservative, we should have accepted that women are victim of violence everywhere in the world. There are so many positive changes which we have recently observed in our society. How men stopped violence against women, it is only possible when women are empowered.”<sup>53</sup>

For women empowerment, the state should have some progressive policies, from access to justice to political participation in public life and ensure full spectrum of women mobility. For the purpose of participation in public and political affairs, women want identity cards, after that can be registered as voter, and then they can contest for parliaments. An effective awareness campaign is needed in this regard. In Malaysia, women form the backbone of United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), the main constituent of the ruling Barisan Nasional<sup>54</sup> coalition, through its women's wing, Wanita UMNO, with its 1.3 million membership that has contributed significantly to the electoral success of successive prime ministers over the last 60 years.<sup>55</sup> Pertinently, female participation in political empowerment in Malaysia may still be relatively low, but steps to thrive any possibilities of changing the

<sup>52</sup> Dr. Farzana Bari. Women in Pakistan: Country briefing paper. Asian Development Bank, 2000. Online, URL: <<https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/32562/women-pakistan.pdf>> retrieved on 16 December 2020.

<sup>53</sup> Dr. Masooma Hasan, Chairperson Pakistan Institute of International Affairs, President Board of Governors, Aurat Foundation, Pakistan, Interview by thesis writer, file is with author.

<sup>54</sup> Is a political coalition of Malaysia that was founded in 1973 as a coalition of right-wing and centre parties.

<sup>55</sup> Mushtak Parker, April 30, 2018, Women to play a major role, New Straits Times. <https://www.nst.com.my/opinion/columnists/2018/04/363656/women-play-major-role>

situation especially the political hierarchy in promoting gender equality among its male and female members have been obvious and consistent in Malaysia.

Measures such as including gender quota should be taken by every political party to acknowledge the significance of having more women at the decision-making level and adapting its internal party quotas; political party needs to institute the 30% minimum quota at all levels to push for women visibility as leaders.<sup>56</sup>

For some commentators, politics is full time job. A vast majority of women cannot play a role into the politics due to the fact that they are housewives and working women. In this scenario, only women from elite and upper class could become politicians. Only if women's role has change, then women could play a positive role in politics. On the other hand, involving politics not only they aware from the world affairs but also can help other women too. The fact matter is that without the help of men, women cannot join politics. In cities atmosphere little better than in the rural areas however their involvement only confined to local level. In rural tribal areas it is impossible for a woman to have a role in public. Unfortunately, at the moment there is no solution to change this situation. While achieving gender equality, the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals also emphasized on state parties to "ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life"<sup>57</sup>

### **Conclusion:**

Women political participation is equally important as it promotes gender balance and allow women to best decide on their interest and welfare. It is high time to start taking action on the above mention steps as well as shed light on the prevailing issues, not only in Pakistan but the whole world due to absence of women participation in legal, social, and economic aspects of life. It is observed that women who have good quality education are more empowered than those who don't, however due to patriarchal norms their life choices are still guarded. On the other, socio-economic development and women's collective action against discriminatory laws and traditions are the most effect tools for their civil liberties. Quality education is fundamental for women not only to achieve economic independence, also aware them their rights and help out to have role in politics as well. They are the key indicators that can strengthen and encourage women to take stand for their fundamental human rights and face the challenges of patriarchy and the undemocratic norms.

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<sup>56</sup> Zaireeni Azmi. 2020. Discoursing women's political participation towards achieving sustainable development: The case of women in Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS). *Kajian Malaysia* 38(Supp.1): 67–88. <https://doi.org/10.21315/km2020.38.s1.5>

<sup>57</sup> Please refer to Ayesha Khan & Sana Naqvi (2020) Dilemmas of Representation: Women in Pakistan's Assemblies, , *Asian Affairs*, 51:2, 286-306, DOI: [10.1080/03068374.2020.1748414](https://doi.org/10.1080/03068374.2020.1748414)