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Women in Academic Debates: Analysis of Academic Scholarship on Islam and Women Politics in Pakistan

Abstract

The primary purpose of parliamentarian is to make legislation to enable the lives of the people as per the requirements of the teachings of Islam (Quran and Sunnah) as described in Objectives Resolution 1949 and the constitution of 1973. In the parliamentary system of Pakistan, women's share as elected representatives is very low. Despite a low share in representation, there are some women's voices that reflect the sentiments of Islamic legislation. There is a wide array of academic scholarship on Islam and women's politics. This scholarship is divided into dogmatic conservative interpretation and liberal and modern interpretation. The dogmatic interpretive knowledge production is not in favour of women's political space but on the other side, modern liberal interpretive knowledge production explains the concept of modernity in Islam and favoured women's political participation. This paper explains the nature of knowledge production on Islam and women politics within the framework of dogmatism and modern interpretive perspective. The modern interpretivism claim that women have equal rights in political representation on the principle of gender equality. Dogmatists claim that women need to live as per prescribed limits set by the sacred injunctions.

Key Words: Islam, Knowledge, Women, Politics, Pakistan

Introduction

The political appearance of women in politics is considerably low as compared to its population. Despite having more than half of the population, women in Pakistan are not well represented in the political sphere. The average percentage of women in the national Parliament is 16%. At the global level, women's share in politics is not encouraging. Only 7% of women are presidents or Prime Ministers. Moreover, there are 9% ambassadors in UNO. The total share in cabinets around the world is 7%, and Mayers' share is 8%. Pakistan is a country amongst many others who provides legal rights for women to participate in politics. Women in Pakistan have played a remarkable role in different sectors of social development. The political sector is an arena where women need more attention. This thesis investigates the nature of women's politics and their role in Islamic Legislation in Pakistan.

Women parliamentarians have had a critical and challenging role in Islamic legislation since the partition of the sub-continent in 1947. This study primarily explored the initiatives of women parliamentarians towards Islamic legislation in Pakistan. Historical studies show that very few women entered into electoral arena and became parliamentarians. In the first legislature (August 10, 1947-October 24, 1954), out of 30 legislators, there were only 2 women parliamentarians. There was no women parliamentarian in the second legislature (May 02, 1955- October 07, 1958). Out of 156 legislative members in the third legislature (June 08, 1962-June 12, 1965) and fourth legislature (June 12, 1965- March 25, 1969), there were six women parliamentarians elected directly. Fifth Legislature (April 14, 1972-January 10, 1977) out of 144, there were only six women parliamentarians elected directly. In the 6th legislature (May 26, 1977-July 05, 1977), there were one women parliamentarian elected directly, and ten were elected on reserved seats out of a total of 210 seats. 7th (March 20, 1985-May 29, 1988) 8th (November 30, 1988- August 06, 1990), and 9th (November 30, 1990-July 17, 1993), 10th (October 15, 1993-November 05, 1996), and 11th (February 15, 1997-October 12, 1999) legislature had 217 total seats in which women got 11 (1 direct, ten reserved), 22 (1 direct, 21 reserved), 24 (4 direct, 20 reserved), two, four and six direct elected respectively. In the 12th legislature (November 16, 2002-2008) and 13th (March 17, 2008-2013), out of 342 seats, there were 60 reserved seats for

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women parliamentarians. The legislative history shows that very few women remained a member of legislative assemblies in Pakistan and feminist reflection on legislation within the framework of Islam is the major thrust of this thesis.

The primary purpose of a parliamentarian is to make legislation to enable the lives of the people as per the requirements of the teachings of Islam (Quran and Sunnah) as described in Objectives Resolution 1949 and the constitution of 1973. In the parliamentary system of Pakistan, women's share as elected representatives is very low. Despite a low share in representation, there are some women's voices that reflect the sentiments of Islamic legislation. Presently the share of women parliamentarians in the Parliament of Pakistan is 21.1%. (UNDP, 2015) Un-even representation is a major cause that affects women's role in legislation, particularly legislation related to Islam. For a comprehensive analysis of the issue under research, this study will also explore the material and conceptual foundations of women's role in Islamic legislation and their status in Parliament. How do global strategies to strengthen women's representation affect legislation linked with Islam in Pakistan?

Before explaining the role of women in Islamic legislation, first, there is a need to explore women's political participation and their relationship with Islamic legislation. Explanation of Islamic perspective of women political participation in an epistemological context will enable the researcher to review an excellent understanding of the role, nature, and status of women's political inclusion and participation and their due share in the legislative process of Islamisation and outcomes. It is one of the fundamental teachings of Islam to protect human dignity empower the powerless. Women are considered as a powerless segment of society, and Islam acknowledges the rights and empowerment of women. The global women suffrage movement for women is, in principle, a movement towards women empowerment, and it is aligned with the basic tenants of Islam. Despite many political rights given by Islam to women, there are many hindrances locally and globally in the way of women's representation. Presently women's political contributions have been acknowledged globally but have multiple political hindrances. The rapid and growing participation of women in legislative affairs is considered as the basic principle to resolve gender equilibrium and gendered social justice in societies. The international campaigns for strengthening women's participation/representation in political processes has been surrounded by multiple arguments, including instrumentalist and intrinsic argument along with religious interpretations. The intrinsic argument argues for gender equilibrium and equal involvement of women in political affairs from the perspectives of human rights as enunciated in Islam. In a logical perspective, global statistics show that the female population occupied more than half of the global share in population, and hence, upon the principle of fairness, they should have equal representation and participation. The other strongest argument is instrumentalist. This argument favoured greater participation of women purely on the essentialist perspective, and it says that women and men are different. This argument further elaborated that females have different orientations of ideas, outlook, vision, and concepts regarding politics as per their different gendered orientation roles as mothers/carer. Resultantly it is expected that women in the political domain will bring an outstanding, caring focus and feminine values to politics. Both approaches are supported by critical mass theory (Kanter 1977, Dahlar 1988). This theory explains women's political representation and their role in legislation and focuses on the considerable women's representation in legislative bodies to influence policies and legislation. Therefore, Islam seems to be in the favour of both Intrinsic and Instrumental approaches along with critical mass theory. There is considerable literature available in support of the justification or theoretical approaches regarding women's participation and inclusion in political spheres.

Critical mass theory and other approaches, including intrinsic and instrumental approaches historical events in Islam, favoured women's inclusion in politics and the decision-making process. Advocates are propagating gender equality on different grounds, facing multiple challenges. This is largely due to the wider gap between private and public values reflected in the international and national level. There are multiple factors that hinder women's participation in political life. These factors include functional, structural, and personal that vary in the different social order. Apart from these local and national issues, there is various generic issue in women's political inclusion in the public domain that relates to the wider orientation of international and national politics, development, and liberal democratic norms. There is a need to explore these patterns critically and review all these narratives and decode and deconstruct the gendered nature of democratic processes as well as

developmental affairs, which make hindrances and limitations on women's effective role in the political sphere. Without proper scrutiny of current development and political narratives, it is difficult to identify women's political participation in public affairs.

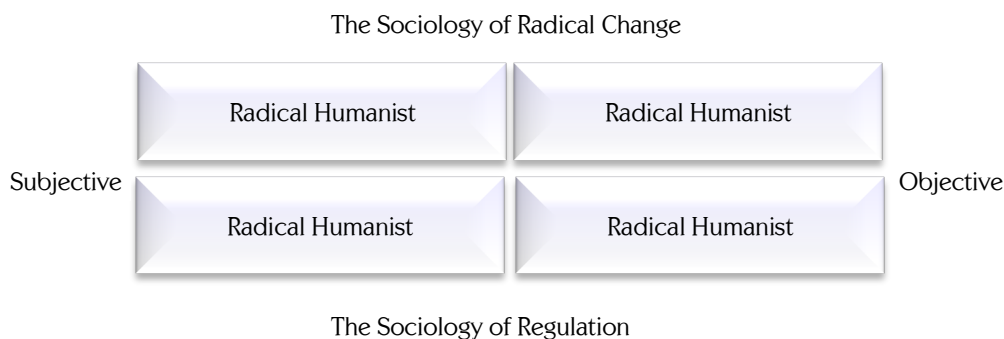
Women's Parliamentary performance and their role in the process of Islamisation is linked with political culture and electoral system. This study will also analyze women's electoral mechanism within the process of Islamisation along with the parliamentary outcomes of women parliamentarians, particularly their response towards Islamisation.

Discussion on Academic Scholarship

There is a scarcity of scholarly literature on women parliamentarians and their relationship with Islamic legislation. Scattered literature is available to the topic under study. Literature produced on women's role in legislation as less attention by scholars. Some scholars focus on women inclusion in higher administrative posts as bureaucrats and heads of government/state along with the additional focus on women participation at local governments and political parties, especially in the superstructural spheres of party higher structures, as having political portfolios, as officials of important key decision-making bodies.

Women influential members, who have key positions in prominent structural political sphere have significant leading roles in political parties, they did not rarely address and bother women's interests, choices etc and questions of gender inequality ([Rai, Shirin M, 2000](#)).

Most significant contribution on women parliamentarians has been made by ([Nabeela Afzal, 1999](#)). This study focused on women parliamentarians as gender activist up to 1977. This study covers the general description without any linkage with Islamisation. The four major paradigms of looking women in politics areas



Source: Burrell, G., & Morgan, G. (1985). *Sociological paradigms and organisational analysis: Elements of the sociology of corporate life*. Routledge.

Another similar study has been made by (Elora Shehabuddin 2008). This study concluded that in male dominated politics, women have little interest to change the decision-making situation in Parliament. Report on the Commission of Inquiry regarding women in Pakistan (n.d) suggested the considerable representation of women in Parliament for effective legislation. John L. Esposito (2001) focused on the power distribution between males and women in Parliament. This study concluded that women's weaker position in politics and Parliament affected decision making and legislation. [Khawar Mumtaz and Fareeda Shaheed \(1987\)](#) focused on women's role in politics. This study describes the major hurdles faced by women in Parliament and politics. (Pariscilla Ofenauer, 2005) has described the state of women in Islamic societies with both conservatives and liberal framework. Zahid Hussain (2008) explain that religious political parties in Pakistan are creating troubles for women participation in politics and these political parties are in favour of total segregation of women from public life. Nasim A. Javed (1999) focused on Islam and political culture and contributions of Pakistan's Parliament. Hussain Haqqani (2005) focused on the increasing share of women after 2002 in Pakistan. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad et. all (1998) focused on the relationship of Islam, gender and social change and

concluded that women public domain is not compatible with *Shariah*. Kathline Fenner [Laird \(2007\)](#) describes women activism in world politics with minor details on women activism in Pakistan. Deniz Kadyoti (1991) highlighted the relationship amongst women, Islam and State. This study focuses on as an ideology of Pakistan and its impacts on women politics in Pakistan. John Obert Voll (1994) also focused on women parliamentarians up to 1990. [Anita M. Weiss \(1986\)](#) explains the process of Islamisation and women status during Zia Era. Firdus Azim (2013) describes the relationship of Islamic culture and women in Asia and also evaluated women activities in Asian Parliaments. [Niaz A. Shah \(2006\)](#) focuses on the relationship of women, the Quran and international human rights along with the role of Parliament in Muslim's countries. The study argues that the basic function of Parliament is to facilitate Muslims to spend and order their lives as per the principles of Islam. Other studies evaluated the relationship of Islam and democratization on empirical basis. This study is based on survey results. This study shows that 35% of Pakistanis are in favour of women status as parliamentarians (Huang, Min-hua, 2013).

Muhammad Rashid Zaka (2013), Huma Yousaf (2013) focused on the role played by women parliamentarians and research practices in Pakistan. They explained the role of women parliamentarians 2008-2012. The article primarily focused on the capacity building of women and their role in national development.

Political performances of women members of legislative bodies who came into national legislature/Parliament on a gender related quota. Despite facing functional and structural barriers, these have difficulties in articulating their voices in Parliament without pushing up any agency. International crises group in 2013 published a detailed report on parliamentary activities of women in Pakistan's democratic transition and focused on the sovereignty of Parliament. Mehboob Hussain (2011) focused on the performance and achievements of Parliament from 1947-1970.

Shaban Gul and Akhtar Hussain (2013) focused on women representation in Parliament. The report expressed that woman have 50% share in population but less represented (19%) in Parliament.

Some other studies explore the women challenging role in politics, Parliament and development. For instance, in development perspectives, Zubaida Jalal, federal Minister of Education during Musharaf Regime 1999-2008 focused on the importance of development. She has the opinion that development has brought significant impact in terms of health, education and income around the globe. She also figure out the paradoxes of development and maintained that development infrastructure left behind 2.5 billion masses who spent less than two US dollars a day on their survival. [\(Zubaida Jalal, 2015\)](#) There are wide disparities and inequalities among and within regions and countries. As per United Nations Development Report, there are 40% of the global population concentrate for 5% of world income while ten percent richest persons concentrated fifty-four percent. (UNDP, 2005). Present global market and the conventional development strategies/tactics based on capitalist economic relations of production flourish an hopes and opportunities developed by gender relations for power and profit. (R. W Connel. 1987) It has been observed through the reading of scholarly literature that there is an intrinsic link and inherent contradiction between women domestic labour and capital accumulation.

Leacock (1982) explained women role in socio, economic and political sphere. Leacock have explained multiple aspects of inequalities amongst gender i.e between men and women. He further pointed out that these disparities could not be understood in separation without integration with capitalist mode of production, neo-liberal order and understanding centre-peripheral relationship as described by Wallerstein. an innovative form of women exploitation. [\(Eleanor Leacock, June Nash. 1977\)](#)

Gender equality is the main component towards gendered development. For inclusive sustainable gendered development, there is a need to create a conducive environment for women political participation. Women low political participation in development is a major hurdle in development.

Democracy is a major tool of political participation of women and it serves both men and women tremendously. Democracy is also a tool to demarcate and separate private spheres with public spheres. The emergence of democratic ideals based on public/ private dichotomies effected gendered dimensions of humanity. It had suffered a woman and excluded her from public domain and retained her in private sphere. Public/private division entrenched on the principle of democracy,

and it cause exclusion of women from the idea of citizenship. Historically, public domain was used to keep women outside from the domain of the political sphere. Many political philosophers and thinkers such as Greek philosopher Plato, and Aristotle, and John Lock, Rousseau and Hegel, Thomas Hobbes, all these philosophers considered women as suitable commodity, a commodity which is suitable only for the role of the household. Due to male dominance over the means of production, women have inferior status in society. The religious scholarship focused on the soft share of women in society like mother, sister and a soul of caring. There is no space for women in the political domain. The role of household is included in private sphere and outside household is considered as public domain. Public and private division and their right to protection is projected as the primary condition of global democracies. ([Anne Phillips. 1988](#)). The normative political theory primarily focused on private domain and consider it a non-political aspect of the society. The compartmentalization of women in the private domain is a tool that is being used to conceal women issues from democratic sphere. ([Bathla, Sonia. 1998](#)). After a long feminist intellectual struggle, women got suffrage rights in the 19th century on the rationale of rights to individual freedom and choice. Women claimed that they are human being and existence as an individual so they the right to vote and express freely. Shirin Rai explained the theoretical basis of liberal democratic theory is fundamentally gendered in ways, that spread outlines of patriarchy and overlooks gender relegation in both society and polity. ([Shirin Roy, Geraldine Valersly, 1989](#)). In liberal political theory, feminist got an intellectual space for their political existence. Women being an individual and an integral part of the society an equal share in voting and inheritance. Women being an integral part of the society are now exercising their right to vote but yet not have any say or influence in public policy formulation. In western democracies, women are facing severe challenges of representation. In the structural formation of gendered politics, women position is strategically entrenched as "powerless" with in male dominated modern democracy. In the male-dominant public sphere, women only represent the voices of the powerful instead of raising their own voice as women. The important supposition in liberal oriented democracies needs to be reorient to generate honest political sphere for women within a society.

Conclusion

During the last few years, there has been an impressive knowledge production over the issue of women politics and Islam which has deconstructed the domination of old k dogmatic knowledge regarding women politics. The recently produced knowledge is now incorporating the voices of viceless and domination over the non-dominance through various disciplinary approaches. The modernist scholars on Islam and women are exploring socioeconomic conditions that shape women political sphere. According to emerging scholarship over women politics, now women are participating in the public sphere with better education and health as compared to previous generations. The labor force, the workplaces and other public places women are sharing their political space due to change in conservative minds and material conditions. In politics, women are now sharing their experience at decision making forums at national and international level.

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