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Feminism and Political Participation: The Paradox of Female's Political Emancipation in Pakistan

Abstract:

Women political participation has been an important issue of the egalitarian societies. The representation of women in the political strata of any society explains the equal role of men and women in political arena. Gender based differences in the society hinders the growth and development of the nation. The feminist movement has been effective in enhancing the female's activism and resultantly the share of females in the politics has been increased in various parts of the global politics. Pakistani society is still evolving towards democratic norms and traditions. The share of female in the political landscape is still negligible and the role of female political leadership is far from satisfactory but representing a good sign towards positive outcomes.

Key Words: Political Participation, female's activism, Pakistan, feminist movement, Gender Discrimination

Introduction

Political representation of women has been an important subject of the feminist activists and it is evident that class, culture and creed play vital role in defining the interests of women regarding their role in political arena. Differences among male and female gender also play important role in determining their position in political sphere. Gender oriented role assigned to women traditionally is one of the fundamental factor that hinders women to come forward in the political domain. It is taken as granted that females will take care the house hold activities and males will be responsible for public and political life. Thus, it is male's discrimination that women are less in number in politics. There are institutional constraints to hinder women to join political offices and desire to hold a public office is decreased due to male dominance and competition. The present study highlights the waves of feminism and connect them with the political emancipation of women in the society. The Pakistani political culture is analysed by elaborating the role of political parties in expanding women's activities among their hierarchy. Although it is a long way to go in the direction of women emancipation, yet the positive omen is perceived by the enlightenment of the society.

Waves of Feminism

The feminist movement gradually emerged on the globe to work against the usurpation of rights. The history of feminism witnessed three waves that encompass the struggle of women for their rights and wellbeing.

The First Wave of Feminism

The first wave of feminism originated in the English speaking countries from 1840's till 1920's in which major focus of the movement was to improve political and economic wellbeing of the people. equal right for women

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were demanded and women gained the right to vote. The first wave of feminism is concerned with the female right of vote. It is the basic ingredient for the political power sharing of the female counterpart in the society. It is well known fact that all the citizens have right to vote but it was not as such long ago. Only men were allowed to vote in elections and females were not entitled to do so. The years of World War I witnessed an activity in the USA for right to vote. Protestors were carrying banners which showed that the government was oppressing women and not treating them adequately (John, 1998). They were also showing the world that being one of the leader of the world, the USA was not giving any care to women. On the contrary, Germany and many other European states allowed women to vote in elections and entitled them with social rights. The National Women Party (NWP) in the USA was working hard for the betterment of women in the USA but it was illegal and the government put many of its members in jail although they were white women and belong to a well-educated class. The leaders of the NWP gained inspiration from Alice who was a radical activist and introduced violent moves of protest, marches etc., as they were more concerned with the female under oppression. The first wave of feminism gained impetus from the global networks as some states were giving female suffrage and social benefits. It was interwoven with the global movements for working rights and also connected with the black women as they were considered unequal and inferior. As the feminists worried about the outcomes of the movement might not be fruitful, they changed their tactics by making it a global controversial matter. They tried to prove that voting of women is extremely important for the betterment of the democracy. The slogan was appreciated by all the classes of women i.e., educated, poor, rich etc. (Code, 2000).

During the course of World War I and II, women were not allowed to go out without men in public points. It was prevalent in every sphere of life. The men were controlling women and judged their potential according to their own mentality. The role of a women was merely to perform biological activities of child birth and household activities. Women were treated as having less intelligence and weak physique (Bressey, 2010). These types of discriminations were pointed out by the feminist activists and they demanded rights to vote and equal status with men. The feminists tried to impress people from all the walks of life about the sufferings of the female cadre. The activists pointed out new slogans and ideas to gain the attention about equity and equal opportunities of women. Mary Wollstonecraft explained the first wave of feminism and suggested that education is the best remedy to eradicate discrimination against women as it will help them to change her position at different professions and aspects of life.

The Second Feminist Wave

The second wave of feminism was prevalent in 1960's and 1970's. Most of the feminist activists were flowing radical ideas and it was a continuation of the earlier feminists' wave to gain the rights for oppressed women. In 1968, a competition was held in the USA called as Miss America Pageants. Women were shown as animals symbolizing the nature of work done by them. It was really annoying to the female cadre as they thought it derogatory and un ethical to consider females as cattle. Not only in the USA, but also in the world. The event was severely criticized by the feminist workers. There was a strong protest to stop the event. The women threw their make-up, clothes and shoes in a bin in front of the reporters and theatre. Women activists were of the view that females are equal to males and men are not controlling the fate of women. The cattle parade was taken as derogatory and humiliation of humanity. The message became more clear that victimization of women will not be tolerated and media started to discuss about gender equality.

There emerged a new wave of civil movements along with the radical feminist movement such as lesbian and gays rights movement, civil rights and black rights movements. All of these movements were anti- imperialistic designs. One of the most important movement was Redstockings movement in response to Bluestocking i.e., educated and civilized women. The movement brought new expressions and ideas like 'politics of home' and 'personal is political'.

The second wave of feminism expands the idea of women right to vote to a new point where women wanted to marry or sex with the one desired by her. They wanted that women should follow the needs and wishes of the body and her mind only. Despite of criticism from various cadres, the women were united to gain the objectives. The long struggle to gain the right of vote and marriage; women ultimately wanted to have complete freedom in every walk of life i.e., political, social and economic. Socialist and liberalists feminist also join in this period. Demands for equal pay and conducive working conditions were presented to the society. Joshel, S. R., & Murnaghan, S. (2005) and were the prominent scholars who mentioned the ideas of female liberty. In 1980's, the feminist activists streamlined the directions and abandoned the ideas of radical feminists. The feminists supported the notion that men and women have equal rights to vote, work or marry according to his or her own wish. Thus the

new women identity was formulated which ensures her right to live and act according to her own desire. Women participated in literature, politics and social activities. Some of the faction of society rejected the women rights but most of the people embraced it positively. Black women in the USA wanted to change her identity as a derogatory one to a normal one. Racism was taken as a hindrance against gender equality specially in case of black women. The waves of feminism came across Europe as well e.g., the French women wanted to change the concept of patriarchal society and men domination in the society. Moreover, it was also demanded to marry anyone she likes.

The ideas of feminism started to fade from the topics of interests for the society gradually as being monotonous in direction. The scholars tried to change the notion and question as they started to ask people about their type of feminists rather than asking about whether or not they were feminists. These types of ideas paved the way for the third wave of feminism.

The Third Wave of Feminism

Rebecca (1992) used the term third wave of Feminism. Third wave of feminism came in response to certain concepts of second wave e.g., prostitution and pornography. This wave of feminism is considered as the strongest group as compared to the earlier ones. Schneiders (2008) explains it as a movement that is beyond social and political emancipation ideas of women and transformation of the whole community. The proponents of the third wave altered the strategy about women rights to make it more effective than the previous one. They utilized more effective way of communication to impress the minds of the community e.g., they started to use the word 'girl' instead of the 'woman'. Fashion and different clothing were created to make it more interesting for young women and girls. It was imbibed in women to trust in herself to alter the world around herself. The riot girls' groups emerged in the USA and Europe in 2004. The methods and tactics were very effective to impress the masses of community. Both print and electronic media was used to impress and point out women's sufferings and rights.

The third wave of feminism witnessed the emergence of important relation of feminism and politics. They used all the available methods to represent the notion. Not only criticism were being done on the previous waves, but also appreciated the efforts of the earlier activists in the struggle of women emancipation. After the fall of communism, new ideas emerged to protect women by raising the voices about different laws for mother care and class. It was argued that violence against women must be ended to construct new images of the women rights in the USA and the world across. The new wave was successful as its ideas were new and attractive which were beyond the stereotype notion of sex and physical matters. They were demanding the social and political rights to identify new issues in the community.

Each of the wave of feminism contributed to the role of feminist activists and politics in its own way starting from the very beginning. Women enabled themselves to gain political, social and economic rights irrespective of their cult and creed and voices were raised to ensure the provision of these rights.

Feminist politics is having two dimensions. The politics of recognition and re-distribution. These are two separate frame of works that deal with feminist politics. Both recognition and redistribution co-relate with each other. Both impinge on the other notion. Redistribution of policies will eliminate poverty and promote economic wellbeing of the women. Single mother is also another society issue where she is being deprived. Economic position alters due to redistribution. Cultural change must be accumulated along with redistribution. Both redistribution and recognition are intertwined. An ideology that can cater cultural devaluation in the economic set up of the society can ensure redistribution and recognition.

Women's Political Participation and Role of Feminism

Feminists have reckoned views with wavering degree while enunciating their research on women representation in politics. One group unequivocally is engaged in debates such as women's legislature behavior, policy formulation for women. Most of the members of the cohort agree that women are likely to be the only representative of women in legal issues. Simultaneously, many feminists explicitly share the idea that there is no empirical or theoretical finding that the women representatives share all or material matters with women. As such, most of the feminists in the group prefer to share the idea that women are likely to "hit the target" for women even as not denying that women representatives may still be "shooting in the dark" (Phillip, 1995).

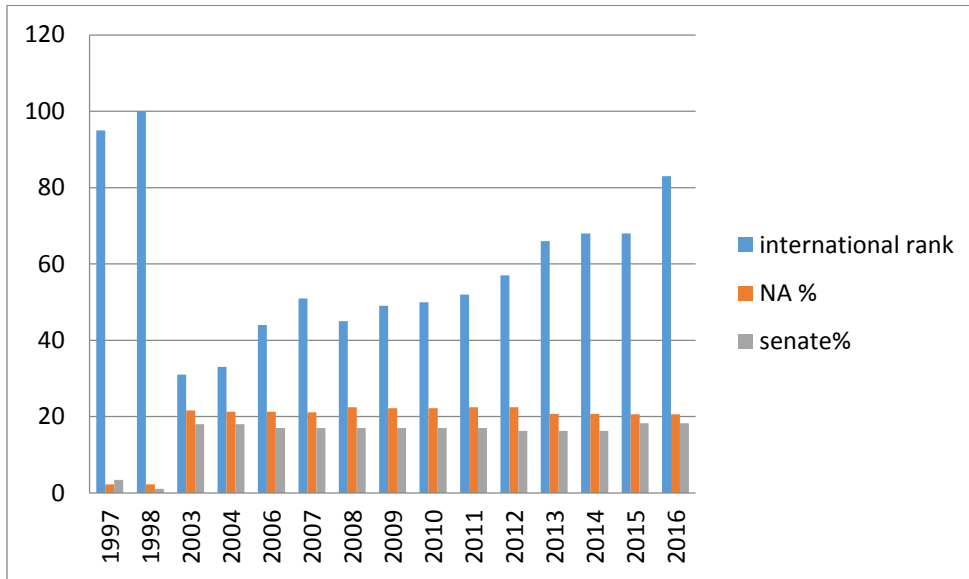
These arguments are empirically validated by observing the behavioral disparities between women and male officeholders (Celis, 2008). The studies found that the male and female officeholders underpin distinct policies in the pipeline (Swers, 1998). Many women parliamentarians are found to state that they feel sense of responsibility toward women to represent them (Ginther, 2004). They demonstrate the same views as women voters and feminist activists (Lovenduski, 1997). With reference to women's attitudes, researchers find that females are deemed to be different from their male counterparts for lawmaking and offering new bills pertains to women (Bratton & Ray, 2002). Moreover, the presence of women has bearing on political discussions (Grey, 2006). However, the group also agrees on the fact that merely enhancing the number of women representatives does not necessarily mean automatic translation of political gains for women. Instead, they consider it important to have a critical actor who can usher policies on his own or spur others to embark policies for women (Cellis & Krook, 2006). Indeed, the critical actors may be not women, men can also play an important role for propelling women's concerns (Tamerius et.al, 2010).

The second group of feminist deals explicitly with legal issues pertaining to women but gives significant insights into two substitute approaches of policy change: feminist's movements and state agencies. The state feminists conjoin these two approaches seeking the extent to which feminists' actors echoes women's movements while deliberating social and economic policies that may be in favor of women (Chappell & Hill 2006). The effectiveness of these state agencies is always advisable to be empirically checked. Therefore, the researchers have conducted studies exploring either these agencies have been triumph in raising women's concerns (Celis, 2016). Many a researchers found that these agencies have effective role in establishing link between movements and state in several issues such as abortion, domestic violence (Weldon, 2002), whoring and political representation (Lovenduske, 2005). Simultaneously, these studies also attach several moderating factors for the success of such agencies such as resources and locations (Rai, 2013).

Status of Women's Political Participation in Pakistan in 21st Century

The 2nd era started from the beginning of 21st century which is the main concern of present study. This era is manifested by the improved women participation at local level, in the assemblies of the provinces and national assemblies as seen in different elections. After taking state power in 1999, military General Pervez Musharraf devoted consideration to improve the participation of women in politics and enhance their representation at all level. He introduced LFO (legal framework order) in 2002 and allocated 17% seats for females in senate (upper house), the national assembly and four provincial assemblies. In local government, 33% of seats for women in all tier of local government also introduced which was ever highest in the history of the state. The 17% quota of women resulted seventeen seats for women in senate of Pakistan. It had improved the number in the national assembly with 60 females. The female number had increased to 128 at provincial level and almost forty thousand seats at all local government tiers. National elections of 2002,2008 ,2013 and 2018 were conducted with this reserved seats for females at federal and provincial level. The proportion of representation of females existing between sixteen to eighteen percent in senate and twenty to twenty-two percent in national assembly from the period 2003 -2016 in Pakistan. Local bodies election held in 2001-2002,2005-2006 and 2015 were having the same quota allocation.

Graph: 3.2 Women in Parliament of Pakistan and International Ranking

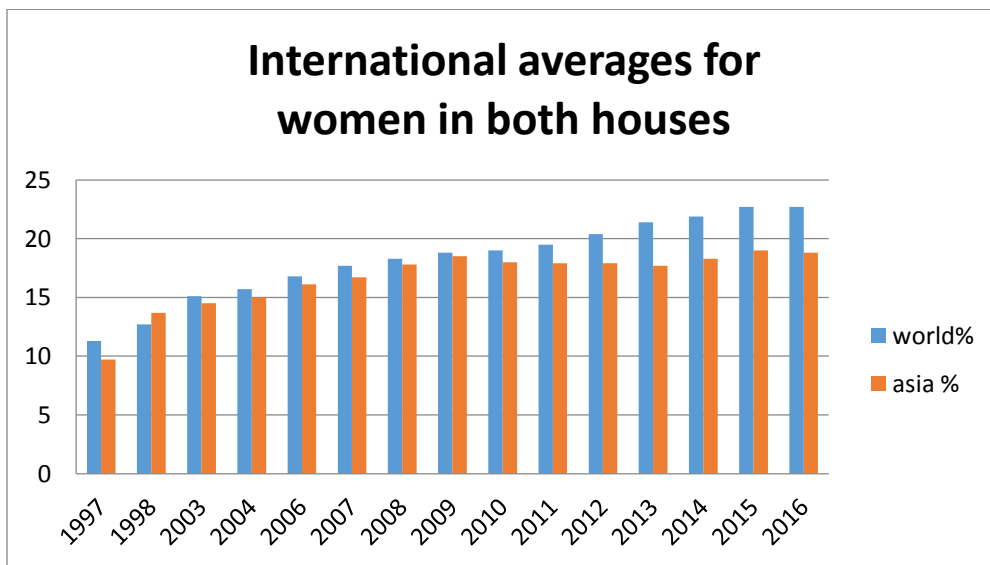


Source: IPU (2017)

Pakistan’s Female’s Political Participation and the Global World

The history of women representation in politics of Pakistan shows the drastic changes in overall representation of women in 21st century. The situation was very poor from independence to the end of the 20th century. The allocation of reserved seats has improved the number of females and hence a visible positive change can be observed towards the representation of women in local, provincial and national level politics. Pakistan achieved 21% representation in national assembly and 18% in upper house (senate) in 2003. It was much better representation as compare to the world average representation of women in politics which was 14.2% in 2003. But even after the two decades, it is fixed and not increased. In 2016, the representation of women in national assembly was 20.6% and 18.3% in senate of Pakistan which was quite lower than international average of 22.7%. Currently, 20.7% women are present in national assembly of Pakistan and 19.3% women are present in senate of Pakistan. It is the need to improve the situation in order to enhance women representation in politics.

Women in Parliaments in Asia and the World (Average)

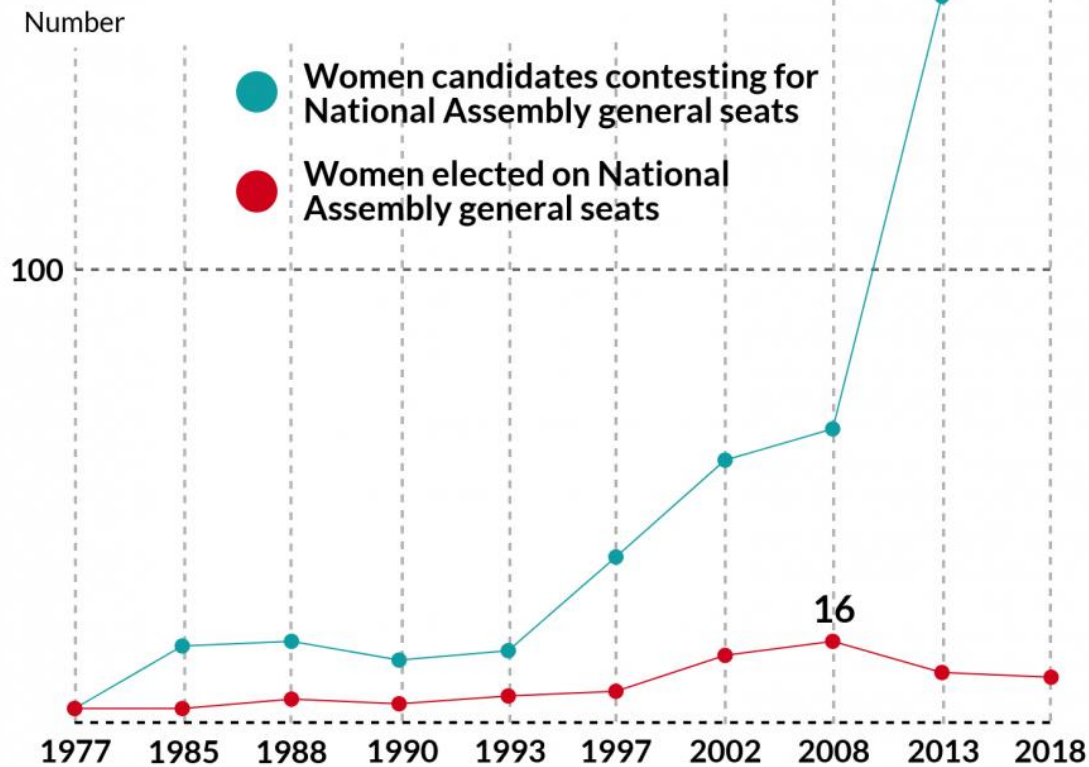


Source: Adopted from IPU (2017)

Although, women have very nominal presence in parliament from independence to the end of the 20th century, yet Pakistan is privileged to have women prime minister twice in the end of 20th century. Benazir Bhutto, served as Prime Minister from 1988 to July 1990 and October 1993 to November 1996. Benazir Bhutto got the privilege of the first woman in the Muslim states who serves at such a high political office. She has also the honor of becoming the Prime Minister for two times. She as a Prime Minister was unable to change or to improve the women condition in the country. Pakistan has enhanced the women quota in the wake of 21st century and improved the presence of women in parliament but it is also fact that no women could gain executive powers in the two decades of 21st century. No single women could become the president of Pakistan till now. Women representation in parliament of Pakistan and the success of only one female clearly indicate that females' political participation and representation is very low in Pakistan. The participation of women is still very low in all tiers of local government as well as provincial and national level. It is the need of the day to take affirmative steps by the political parties, religious leaders, state and the women themselves.

PAKISTANI WOMEN IN PARLIAMENT

The number of women candidates contesting National Assembly general elections increased gradually from 1977 to 2008 but saw a massive rise in 2013. The number of women elected to National Assembly general seats was highest in 2008.



SOURCE: HEINRICH BOLL STIFTUNG, ELECTION COMMISSION OF PAKISTAN

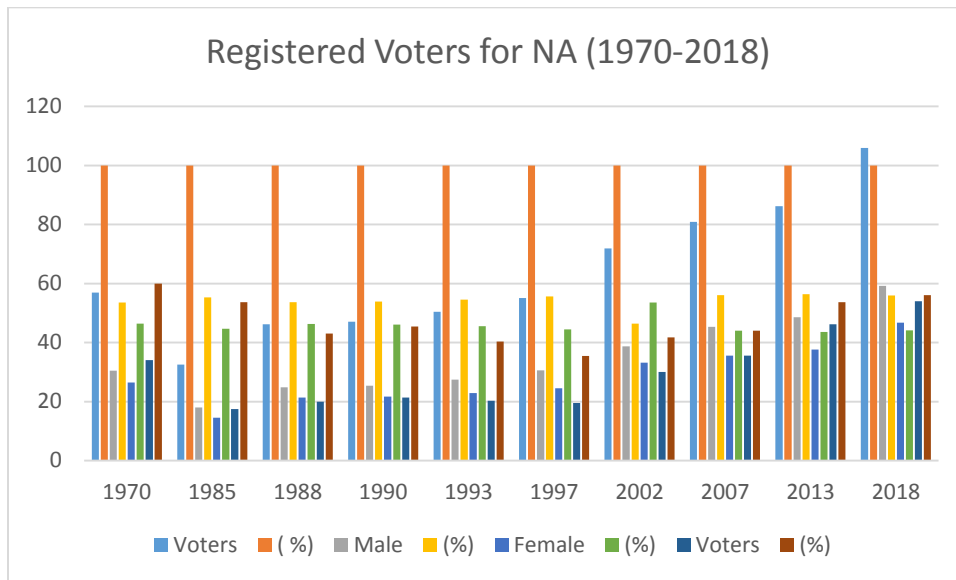
Females Voters and Pakistan's Political system

Females' participation in politics of Pakistan is always marginal when compare to it male counterpart. The registered women voters of Pakistan have 45 % to 46% all over the country since 1993 (Shaheed, 1998). Within the passage of time, women voters increased. Gender disparity in registration of voters still exists.

The Issue of Low Turn Out

In Pakistan, all general elections turnout of men and women show the gender disparity very clearly. Election commission of Pakistan provided the statistical data regarding the turnout of males and females in general elections and it is witnessed that the turnout of female voters in local bodies election of 2005-2006 was minimum as compared to men.

Number of Registered Voters in Pakistan (1970-2018)



Source: Election Commission of Pakistan (2018).

Political Parties and Women’s Participation in Pakistan

Political parties play a very important role in a democratic society. Being a patriarchal society, political parties are dominated by the male members and they also have key positions in political parties of Pakistan. The women have very nominal role in the political parties of Pakistan.

Post-independence history of Pakistan indicates the condition of females’ politics in various political parties was not encouraging. Women contribution in political parties can be realized through their representation in different committees of the political parties or their presence in executive decision making councils. Moreover, the level of participation can also be judged through counting the women who were nominated by the parties in elections. Membership of women in political parties of Pakistan has no statistical data to show the ratio of men and women participation. It can be judged through their presence in rallies, public gatherings and rallies arranged by the respective political parties. Women participation in political parties can be seen in the history of late 1960s when women took active part in the rallies and protest of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto movement against military regime. Similarly, MQM has also supported by a large number of women during the period of 1980s and 1990s. Telephonic address of MQM Quaid Altaf Hussain was listened by the large number of women in Karachi from time to time. Pakistan Tehreek e Insaf has also shown a strength of its women supporter. The processions of PDM (Pakistan democratic movement) has a large number of women supporters. Processions, gatherings, sit INS and assemblies indicate PTI young women supporters to a large extent.

The participation of females in political offices of the parties was very low even till 21st century. It was sighted 1st time during the Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto mass mobilization when women were motivated to take part in politics and public meetings. Pakistan people’s party was the pioneer to create females wing. Other parties followed this step and established women wing in their parties. Initially, they have very minor role in party politics but gradually their share in party hierarchy has increased.

Almost all political parties have established women wing but their role was nominal in the beginning. In political parties, women were not allowed to have share in decision making process of executive committees. In 1997, only three women from PPP and 5 from PMLN were member of executive committee these political parties. (The Commission of Inquiry for Women, 1997). In 2019, out of twenty-seven federal ministers, three women are serving as federal ministers i.e Dr Shireen Mazari, (ministry of human rights), Zubaida Jalal (federal minister of defence production), Zartaj Gul (minister of state for climate change) whereas Dr. Fehmida Mirza is heading Inter-

provincial coordination division. Currently, there are 36 parliamentary secretaries out of which fourteen are women. There are currently thirty-four standing committees of national assembly out of which two are headed by the women MNAs. In senate, there are fifty different committees in Senate out of which ten are headed by the women.

Females' Role at in Political Offices at the Hierarchy

Fatima Jinnah was the 1st woman who played her role as opposition leader from January 1, 1960 to July 9, 1967. She was the sister of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah. Benazir Bhutto took hold of the office of the Prime Minister in 1988. She was elected twice as Prime Minister in 1988 and in 1993. She also became opposition leader for two times i.e., November 6, 1990 to July 18, 1993 and from February 17, 1997 to October 12, 1999. Dr Fehmida Mirza served as female speaker of the national assembly and also had the privilege of the first woman speaker of the Muslim countries. Dr. Ashraf Khatoon Abbasi was the 1st deputy speaker of national assembly in 1973 to 1977. She was again selected as deputy speaker in 1988 to 1990. Dr Noor Jahan Panazai was elected as deputy chairman of senate in 1991. She was the 1st woman deputy chairman of senate. Sherry Rahman became 1st women leader of opposition in senate in the year 2018. Raheela Durrani was elected 1st deputy speaker of Baluchistan assembly in 2015. Shehla Raza was elected twice as deputy speaker of Sindh provincial assembly from April 7, 2008 to 19 March 2013, and from May 30, 2013 to May 18, 2018. Rehana Laghari was elected as deputy speaker of provincial assembly of Sindh and is still serving.

Conclusion

Feminism has cast huge influence in political emancipation of women in the global society. The trends of feminism have been changed from time to time in history but the core feature remained the same. The political awareness among the strata of society has enabled different political parties to incorporate more women in the political hierarchy. Although, the percentage of women in Pakistani political parties is less as compared to many developing nations, yet the continuous improvement in the percentage of female political leadership explains that Pakistani political culture is evolving in the right direction of women political emancipation.

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