Oligarchic patriarchal political culture of women participation in South Asia: with special reference to India, Bangladesh, Pakistan.

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The research paper to be presented in the World Congress 2014 organized by IPSA from 19th-24th July 2014 at Montreal, CANADA

Penal- MT05, 291 “Women politicians in South Asia: Symbols of Oligarchic Patriarchal Political Culture”

Convener & Chair- Dr. Sushila ramaswamy
Room No. 518b
Date- 21st July 2014
Time-11:00

Abstract
Democracy the much popular and highly debated concept in present times has become an objective of maximum countries to be achieved around the world. It is the concept of a state which provides the great values of freedom and rights to each and every individual without any discrimination which further indicates the equality among all. Democracy strives towards equality and representation of every individual in decision making walk of life. This only makes the increasing popularity of the concept and practice of democracy. Women lives in South Asia very often are affected by various socio cultural and ethnic populations, a range of religious faiths, legal frameworks, economic and political forces. Despite diversities across countries, women of South Asian region face similar condition on various fronts. Oligarchy is usually employed indiscriminately to describe any government in which only a small minority has the controlling power. In patriarchal social order authority is vested upon the man who takes the responsibility for maintenance of family, for he is considered stronger than women. Patriarchy characterizes South Asian countries like India, Pakistan and Bangladesh where women are dominated by a kin orders social structure. These countries have been permeated with the deep rooted patriarchal culture that commands their half of the population in the form of women.

Keywords
Oligarchy, Patriarchy, Political participation, Political Culture, Democracy, Women Representation,
Democracy the much popular and highly debated concept in present times has become an objective of maximum countries to be achieved around the world. It is the concept of a state which provides the great values of freedom and rights to each and every individual without any discrimination which further indicates the equality among all. Democracy strives towards equality and representation of every individual in decision making walk of life. This only makes the increasing popularity of the concept and practice of democracy.

In this context, a question arises, if democracy really successful in providing equal rights to all? Consequently, a specific region of Asia cherishing democracy since years and seeking equality for every individual yet draws the attention of all the academicians towards it. The South Asian region, which endued with several democratic nations, still demands the equality in case of women. Democracy includes everybody concerns in every field. In this regards women’s socio-economic and political rights are integral part of human rights which in turn are fundamental aspects of democratic framework. Therefore while formulating any decision or carrying out any strategy in democracy it is essential to take into accounts the views of all involved groups.

A sound democratic framework requires equal participation and account of gendered governance in decision making for the credibility of the policies on citizen lives. Women lives in South Asia very often are affected by various socio cultural and ethnic populations, a range of religious faiths, legal frameworks, economic and political forces. Despite diversities across countries, women of South Asian region face similar condition on various fronts (Rustagi, 2004:1).

Certain common features like centralized government socio-economic inequalities based on class, gender and caste and nationalistic divisive claims on ground of ethnicity has characterized the South Asian countries. In this region it is common that formal political system is dominated by male which can be visible in the assignment of women to the soft portfolio and consider protection necessarily, for they are believed as weak by nature. They are expected women to remain outside politics as it is a dirty game (Kabir 2003:1). This tendency exemplifies the oligarchy, where decision making rights and freedom is centralized in the hands of a few instead of all. This group deals with the male society who acts as dominant over the dependent female group. Here we can see, since years the first group has been maintaining its oligarchy in every field of life that might have been family, social or political.

Oligarchy is usually employed indiscriminately to describe any government in which only a small minority has the controlling power (Garner, 1952:311). This belongs to the form of organization in which a small group of the chosen few marked out by birth, wealth, and status and like makes all decision largely in its own interest (Johari, 2011:452). It remains to be observed that such a system of the oligarch’s rule, whether old or new reveals the residence of power and its exercise by a very few. Obviously this type of rule is indicative of the limited political participation as it tries to keep the people away from the stream of progress with a view to perpetuate its own class-rule (Singh, 1966:163). This criterion of few people belongs to the male dominating class over women. The age old and universal dominance of man over woman is manifested in the concept of patriarchy.

Marlin French defines patriarchy as: “the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general. It implies that men hold power in all the important institutions of society and women are deprived of access to such power. It does not imply that women are either totally powerless or totally deprived of rights, influence and resources (French 1985:239)”
Literally, patriarchy means “the rule of the father”. The term was originally used to describe the social organization based on the authority of male heads of households. It describes a political system ruled by men in whom the women have inferior social and political status including basic rights (Kottack, 2005:198). In patriarchal social order authority is vested upon the man who takes the responsibility for maintenance of family (Sarkar, 1997), for he is considered stronger than women.

Consequently, he must be the guardian of the family and accept his duty of protection and security of the members. Nevertheless, he gradually crowned himself as a super power of the family women discrimination.

Patriarchy characterizes South Asian countries where women are dominated by a kin orders social structure (Matherma; 1998). Socio-cultural conservative served to curtail mobility for women in this region, enforcing them to inferiority and subordination. In South Asia, several social cultures indicate the devaluation of women as human beings from their birth. Since childhood girls are made aware of that they are the liabilities unlike their brothers who are assets to the family. In the process of socialization, girls are taught to adjust in the means of total submission and obedience to the will of husband and his family with patience and sacrifice towards their desires. From early childhood girls perceive the preferential treatment given to their brothers, father and other male family members. Normative behaviors derived from this value include institutional discrimination against women in education, health and in the labor force resulting in lower wages and relative socio-economic & political deprivation (Nevback, 1996:111).

Societies featured with patriarchy exemplify the male dominating through the practices of dowry, sati and female infanticide. Almost 50 percent population of the world includes women especially in Asia. However the male domination on women is one of the socio-economic and psychological problems in patriarchal societies, at the household level as well as other spheres. Consequently dependency on man by women has already been imprinted in their mind which is one the constraints to make them self dependent and self reliant. They bear low status, no access to property and suffer from non recognition for their largely unpaid home based labor. (Rustagi, 2004:1). Even the employed and significant role-playing women are not independent in real sense though they have the liberty of social interaction. Women have no individual identity in several societies of South Asia rather they are address by their kinship positions. In patriarchal culture, only the relatives of the father are significant under the kinship system (Richard T., 2006:324).

**Women in the Governance in South Asian Nations:**

Many women have been on the top ruling seats in less egalitarian societies and political systems. Asia has the second highest number of women executives, the vast majority concentrated in South Asia where women have occupied more traditional role and low statuses. One of the most important pieces of women’s background involves familial ties and the importance of kinship for succession in countries. Especially many women leaders in South Asia have blood or marital relations with slain or imprisoned leaders and even though the general political participation and activity of women in these countries has been restricted. Women are perceived as filling a political void created by death or imprisonment of a male family member (Richter 1991).

For more than 60 years, India and Sri lanka have been experiencing democracy but Pakistan and Bangladesh have been fluctuating between democracy, militarism and autocracy. Nepal had padded through a turmoil situation. As we all know the history of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh that they all come from the same family subcontinent and can be titled as sister countries. This region of Asia had endured a commotion for many years before
and after their independence which halted its citizens to acquaint their human rights and freedom so far. One of the significant characteristic of these South Asian countries is that equality grievances are embedded in the minds of people so far. Women are yet discriminated in the major walks of life. Highest position in the government of these South Asian countries had been occupied by women is a key feature of this region with some classic examples of Indira Gandhi Pratibha Patil and Sonia Gandhi in India, Sheikh Hasina and Khalida zia in Bangladesh, Benazir Bhutto in Pakistan.

Even though these women had occupied the highest positions in government, yet the statistics of these nations reveals a different picture. The vast majorities of South Asian women are illiterate, in poor health, inactive towards the national accounts and suffer legal, political, economic and social discrimination in all the streams of life. Another noticeable fact, that women in South Asia have the lowest rate of participation in their governance as compared to many developed nations.

Participation, accountability, predictability and transparency are the basic characteristics of good governance. In this context good governance generally calls for gender balance in political decision making. These countries have been permeated with the deep rooted patriarchal culture that commands their half of the population in the form of women. It has overshadowed the South Asian culture of equal and active participation of the individuals & especially of India.

**Gender Inequality Index 2012:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr. No.</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>HDI Value</th>
<th>GII Rank</th>
<th>GII Value</th>
<th>MMR</th>
<th>Female Seats in National Parliament (%)</th>
<th>Inequality life expectancy index value</th>
<th>Inequality adjusted education index value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>0.955</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.065</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>39.6</td>
<td>0.928</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>0.938</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0.115</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>0.937</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>0.256</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0.863</td>
<td>0.941</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>0.875</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>0.205</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>0.903</td>
<td>0.806</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>0.629</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>0.462</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>41.1</td>
<td>0.376</td>
<td>0.558</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>0.554</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>0.525</td>
<td>0.264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>0.515</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>0.518</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>0.595</td>
<td>0.252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>0.515</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>0.567</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>0.487</td>
<td>0.217</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

HDI – Human Development Index, GII – Gender Inequality Index, MMR - Maternal Mortality Ratio

UNDP Report makes it clear about the given several nation’s human development conditions, that Countries with unequal distribution of human development also experience high inequality between women and men whereas countries with higher gender inequality also experience unequal distribution of human development. The scene is absolutely clear that South Asian nations are much lagging behind the developed countries in the human development index where Bangladesh and Pakistan stay at the same rank. The value of gender inequality indicates the women situation regarding their freedom and rights in their
respective country. In South Asian countries, after the provision of reservation of seats in the popular house women are still not getting a significant position in decision making like Bangladesh 19.7 and Pakistan 21.1 percent whereas Indian women are still struggling for an adequate representation which is only 10.9 percent in the comparison of developed countries like Norway having 39.6%, UK with 22.1%, Australia having 29.2% that makes a big difference.

There are many factors affecting women representation in the decision making bodies of a nation. The South Asian and developing nations are still looking forward a better education, employment and socio-economic conditions where every individual may have an equal part. Supportive and open cultural and religious customs with the equal political and electoral systems are required to assure the equality to all in every walk of life.

Causal Factors of Women Representation:

![Flowchart showing factors affecting representation]

Status of Women in the Indian Ruling Structure:

In Indian society the status of women has changed time to time. Indian women enjoyed equal status with men in all fields of life in the ancient period. She received the same education and importance in the means of “Ardhangini” of her husband. In medieval period, her status went down and was considered to be inferior to man. New customs of Pardah, Sati, child marriages, and restrictions on widow marriage penetrated in the society. They have been the factors responsible for the injustice done towards women. In modern India women status has changes considerably. Her position is equal to that of men socially, economically, politically, educationally and legally. Her suffering from sati, child marriages do no longer exist. (Mahananda, 2010:37) After a long journey of several social reforms and acts implemented by the British government on the movements of Indian reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Swami Dayanand Saraswati and Vivekanand etc.

Today, the Indian womanhood is marching towards liberty and equality after the eradication of social evils through the various social legislation means. The early history of women’s awakening in British India reflected the differential processes of the social formation of Hindus and Muslims. The social reform movement, the women social reformers
and the freedom movement fashioned the pattern of women’s participation in public life in the immediate pre-independence era. With regards to women’s issues, Muslim & Hindu reformers turned their attention mainly to education and Pardah which was a determinant of social and gender relations. Although both Hindu and Muslim women came to the public forum but mostly they belonged to aristocratic political families and followed their male relatives into politics, yet the lower and middle class women were not more vigilant towards their rights and freedom.

**Role of Women in the British Colonial Freedom Struggle:**

Indian women have played a vital role in the freedom struggle of India with immense courage, confidence and patriotism which provided them a significant place in the Indian society. Although they have not been found to be politically very conscious or involved in day to day political issues, women have mobilized themselves during crisis situation. The iconic figures like Ahilyabai Holkar and Rani Laxmi Bai came together along with the men with the ambition of independent India during 1857. Indian women actively participated in the revolution and movement for social change during the national struggle for independence in the late 19th century through the Indian national congress.

The social reform movement from the mid 19th century prepared the base for women’s awakening and their entry in the movement later on. These movements resulted the ban of the practice of sati, female infanticide, plight of the widow, child marriage, polygamy etc. affecting them consequently, the campaign against child marriage or child widows were incorporated by women despite strong opposition from the Orthodox who defined it as an attack on religion. This “religion identity” had to be challenged to make active even a consistent democratic liberalism or liberal feminism because it had remained castist and Patriarchal.

Though men kept control within the family and within public life, the slow movement of women out of male reformers and later the nationalists helped to extend the female space for action. (Minault, 1981) Therefore a great number of women strengthened the reform and nationalist movements. Sarla Devi, Sucheta Kriplani, Kamla Nehru, Kasturba Gandhi, Vijay laxmi pandit and later on Indira Gandhi entered the freedom struggle with complete patriotic support. Aruna Asaf Ali, Sarojini Naidu, Madam Kama, Begum Hazrat Mahal, Amjadi Begum, Sadat Bano Kichle, Zulekha Begum and others fought gallantly for freedom of India. SatyaGraha, Civil Disobedience and Quit India movements witnessed direct participation of women instead of supportive auxiliaries. By and large the leaders of the national movement envisaged a supportive role of women despite their involvement in direct action. Gandhi himself described the difference between men and women, “She is passive, he is active. She is essentially the mistress of the house he is the bread earner (Kishwar, 1976:19)”. Women were inducted by the leaders because of their nature of self- sacrifice, non-violence and ability to endure pain. The new patriarchy of nationalism gave women a new social responsibility not to alienate men but “to maintain the cohesiveness of family life and solidarity with the kin group”. In addition, by associating the task of female emancipation with sovereign nationhood, nationalism bound them to yet entirely legitimate subordination (Majumdar, 1989).

Though the social reform helped to improve the status of Indian women and placed great importance on education as the emancipator of women. However it never became the sole agent for gender equality while suffered from the basic contradiction between the upliftment of women and limited vision of that upliftment. Everything had to be done within the framework of patriarchal family. Women were not seen as individuals. Similarly the national movement leader envisaged an auxiliary role for women in the movement because
women were believed to pay their devotion to service and self sacrifice like Sita whether to her family or the nation. As a result the women status had to be improved but institutions curtailing their freedom were to be retained (Niroj, 200: 88).

Representation of Women in the Indian Politics:

India’s bicameral legislature consists of a 545 strong lower house and a 250 member upper house. Women in the two houses largely belong to the relatively privileged middle class, are educated and in professions. Some women enter through the caste quota. Despite the constant low number of women having returned as legislature some have reached positions of power in mainstream political parties and in governance like Sonia Gandhi, president of former ruling Congress party, Jayalalitha (CM of Tamilnadu), Mayawati (the former CM of U.P.). Mamta Banerjee(The former CM of West Bengal) and Vasundhara Raje Sindhiya (CM of Rajasthan). Indira Gandhi has been the archetype for women who are trying to obtain political representation as well as place in the power structure in post independence India. She represented the symbol of the women’s ascent to power, however her rise to power movement than to a combination of other factors such as back ground in the nationalist movement and the congress (I)’s need for a compromise candidate.

Women representation in Lok Sabha (Popular House):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr. No.</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Members</th>
<th>Total women members</th>
<th>% of women Members out of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1952</td>
<td>499</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>4.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1957</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1962</td>
<td>503</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1967</td>
<td>523</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1971</td>
<td>521</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>544</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>544</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>544</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>517</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>544</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>544</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>7.5</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>543</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>543</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>9.6</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>545</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>9.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>545</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>543</td>
<td>62**</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Election Commission of India

Reviewing women’s political participation in India it is clear that women had a negligible impact on the political process either they constitute a numerical majority or had been on the top seats of Prime Minister (Indira Gandhi) and President (Pratibha Devi Singh Patil). Women have been in marginal status in the popular house of India since 1947. By 1980 general election the women MPs ratio didn’t cross merely 10% it had been only almost 6% by the time. There is marginal improvement in the number of women candidates even in the 2014 general elections. Although it has been the greatest 11.4% of women candidates in
the popular house of national policy making body yet not a proper participation compared to that of male candidates among the total of 543 members. Only 62 women are having a great responsibility of the whole nation’s women representation, which proves a critical picture of participatory democracy in India.

Women Power shares in Bangladesh:

Bangladesh, the South Asian country has been impetus for the women representation in politics as well, majority of women nevertheless constitute as majority of the poor because the means of production and decision power are owned and controlled by the men. The traditional society of Bangladesh permeated with patriarchal values and norms of female subordination and segregation. There is a high premium placed on female chastity and Purdah that reinforces the view that society is dichotomized into public and private spaces and the stereotyped gender roles that assigns women to the seclusion of the domestic share (Najma 1999:94)

The custom of Purdah, molded by culture tradition and age old religious interpretations, legitimizes the exclusion of women from public spheres, enhances their dependence on and subordination to men and marginalizes their special status. Although these customs are being eroded for survival needs as women venture out and partly by modernized however the values persist. The culturally prescribed and economically sanctioned subordination deprive women of education, employment opportunity and sense of self identity. Social conservatism is buttressed by religious orthodoxy. According to Quran, for example, a daughter’s inheritance is half the share of a son and a male inherits more or even twice as much as female at almost every stage of succession. (Najma, 1999: 95)

In Bangladesh, traditional gender roles keep most women from gaining political power. Women’s political engagement in Bangladesh occurs in the context of the country’s poverty, the culture of female subordination and weak political institutions. In Bangladesh state and civil society both are not structured in a gender neutral way. Added with, the changing regimes couldn’t fortify the equality norms. A favorable political climate is essential for improving the status of women.

Bangladesh had been East Pakistan (1947-1971) it was part of a patriarchal political culture in which men dominates and controlled the spheres of power-political, military and bureaucratic. Only a few women appeared in the political arena in Pakistan, generally in roles appended to those of husbands or male relatives. In society as well as in politics women played subordinate, supportive and dependent roles due to inequitable customs. The progress towards gender parity is still far from satisfactory measures even after several movements and demands of organizations of civil society and women groups.

Since independence, Bangladesh has experienced continuing political instability weak democratic institutions and a legacy of the Pakistan period have lacked nurturing during the two decades of Bangladesh’s existence. The assumption in colonial India-that different communities and their interests should be represented in the legislative assemblies was adopted in Pakistan to provide for women’s representation through the reservation of legislative seats. Although the specific number of seats reserved for women changed over time. All along constituting a small proportion of the total, the electoral process remained basically the same except in the 1954 election in East Bengal women were elected indirectly to the reserved seats by the legislature.

The constitution of Bangladesh provides for formal political equality of men and women in the means of contesting or voting on the grounds of same qualifying tests for any of the representation office. Women are entitled to the same fundamental rights as men but the equality of participation by women and their equal rights in all spheres of national and
public life is more ideal than real. Socio cultural factors shape and limit the nature of women’s political engagement.

The Bangladesh constitution framers got a legacy from Pakistan, the right to vote, 300 general seats of parliament along with the provision of reserved seats to safeguard a minimum representation of women in view of their disadvantaged position in society. The reservation of seats in the constitution reflects a paternalistic approach to women’s representation.

The ruling parties did not nominate women for general seats in the first two elections held in 1973 and 1979 but treated the reservation provision as a device to exclude women from general seats, which thus came to be treated as seats for men. (Najma1999: 95) The nomination process and the electoral principle of reserved seats for women render woman’s participation in the legislature dependent on the patronage of the male elite in the party in power and accentuate women’s dependence and subordination in the political sphere.

Reservation also undermines women’s representative status. Where 300 and 30 constituencies were divided for general and reserved seats respectively, then the reserved seats (women) and general seats (usually male) ratio shall be 1:10 resulting in a weak local power base for women. On the other side indirect election for the reserved seats eliminates the need and risk of electoral investments both political and material.

Unicameral legislature of Bangladesh (Jatiyo Sanghsad) emerged with 300 members in the parliament. The constitution provided for 15 reserved seats for women (Clause 65), these were doubled to 30 in the second national assembly (1979-1982). The reservation of seats lapsed in the 1986 assembly to counter opposition moves to destabilize the regime. However the 10th constitutional amendment June 1990 provided for 30 reserved seats for women in the parliament for ten years from the commencement of next parliament. The seats lapsed in 2001. In the year 2004, 8th parliament legislation had been passed according to 14th constitutional amendment for restoration of reserved seats and increase in the quota to 45 seats. The women are indirectly elected by the members of house on the basis of proportional representation through single transferable vote. They are not barred from contesting on the general seats. Currently according to 15th constitutional amendment there are 350 seats in parliament of which 50 seats are reserved for women that will continue for ten years from the beginning of the 9th parliament (2009-2014) (Mumtaz 2005)

Constitution plays a vital role of ensuring women’s political participation in the country. The constitution of Bangladesh has been committed to provide for equality of men and women. The constitution promotes the women to contest or Vote for any elective office including that of head of the state. (Constitution of the people’s republic of Bangladesh).

Since independence Bangladesh has experienced political instability, weak democratic institution and a legacy of the Pakistan period have lacked nurturing during two decades of Bangladesh’s existence.

In the beginning of 1980’s first Sheikh Hasina and later Khalida Zia emerged in leadership roles in the Awami league and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party respectively. These two women, who headed their respective parties and alliances, played principal and often crucial roles in the mobilization against Lt. General Hussain Muhammad Ershad the former president leader of National Party after General Zia-Ur-Rahman after the eventual fall of Ershad in 1990, and consequent elections of 1991, Begum Khaleda Zia took oath of Prime Minister of People’s Republic of Bangladesh. Sheikh Hasina became the leader of the opposition. An Islamic fundamentalist Party Jamaat-i-Islami entered with 18 seats in the parliament. It’s aim to establish an Islamic way of life in Bangladesh by propagating public private dichotomy and assigning women to private world. In 1989 the leader of a conservative rightist party stated that Islam does not allow a woman to be head of State (New nation Daily 27 December, 1989 Chowdhary : 1999:109)
The emergence of women in Bangladesh political arena on the top seats of Nation in the form of Sheikh Hasina and Khalida Zia represents a paradox in a patriarchal culture that is best explained by their kinship linkages to male authority Mujib-ur-Rehman (Awami League) and Zia-ur-Rehman (BNP Leader) respectively. Both of the women’s political personality dies in their symbolizing the former leaders. Their transformation from housewives to party leaders during 1981-83 underscores their potential as unifying forces. Sheikh Hasina and Khalida Zia have inherited the Slain leaders, which sanctified their status initially, where inheritance has legitimated their leadership. The parties led by both the women are recognized as the legitimate successors to those led by Mujib-ur-Rahman and Zia-ur-Rehman. The political careers of other leading women illustrate. The women without famous political fathers and husbands can advance to higher streams only through decades of extensive political involvement and sacrifice.

*Women Representation in Bangladesh parliament:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr. No</th>
<th>Year of Election</th>
<th>Women elected among all elected MPs (%)</th>
<th>Reserved seats for women (%)</th>
<th>Total women in parliament (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1973</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0.7</td>
<td>0 **</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
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<td>10</td>
<td>10.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>2.3</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>14 ***</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19.1</td>
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</table>

* In 1973, the reserved seat was 5 percent, ** from 1979 onwards it was 10
  † In 2004 the reserved seat was 13 percent, ***In 2009 the reserved seat was 14 percent

On the study of the parliamentary participation of women in Bangladesh, it seems to be very painful to see that only around 20% representation leads a half of the population of the country as women where 14% reservation is also provided. As we go through the situation it is concluded that women in Bangladesh are very few elected on the general seats of the national constituencies. A simple question arises that what would have been happened if the reserved seats provision is eliminated from the constitution, the picture would be more traumatic that the rest of the representation is very low around 5% only. It is much essential for the policy makers and people in power to promote the women participation and equality to acquire a real development and significant status in the world’s developed countries in every state.

Women status, so far has been one of welfare and development, paternalism and protection and not one of social transformation and equity. Women’s concerns are perceived behind the poverty and under development. The major parties project them to the electorate not as central but a marginal. Overall, women still face many obstacles in their fight for representation. Unlike the earlier elite women activists and representatives, most women have not had the economic and social freedom. Lack of education, less health situations growing violence against them as well as their cultural socialization have been the major obstacles in their political path of non-elite women.
Pakistan Political phase and Women’s active role:

Gender politics frames the current debate on women’s role and position in Pakistani society. Women in Pakistan are in incredibly grim situation due to lack of economic opportunities, denial of access to education and health and under representation in politics and decision-making. Traditional conservative norms of female subservience are compounded by a multitude of special interest groups including Tribalists and Tahreek-e-Taliban Pakistan who arguably present the giant threat to the women empowerment of Pakistani women on the grounds of deeply ingrained patriarchal mentality. Recently, Malala Yusufzai’s efforts for education faced a harsh climate of Terror that exemplified the exclusion of Pakistani girls and women from the participation and education is better to be safe. “The patriarch’s support bestows power and prestige on the daughter, facilitates her presence in the public domain and legitimates her political authority and activities, thus working to silence her detractors, is a paradox of patriarchy” (Haeri, 2012) However, despite the numerous efforts of women’s groups like NGOs, WAF, APWA, PAWLA and more on, women status has been socially and politically remained excluded.

Since the British Indian Period, women activists started their struggle in a very few number because of strong barriers implemented by religion, culture, traditions included with government. In fact, feminism in Pakistan cannot be understood without considering its antagonistic engagement with Islamization. (Jamal 2005:61)

In the early years of Pakistan’s life (1947-58), the orthodoxy was looked upon with disdain the irrelevance by the political leadership. Some measures to pacify them were also taken, for instance, Pakistan was declared an Islamic Republic under the Constitution of 1956 and the Ulema were provided with an advisory role in the legislature (Mumtaz and Shaheed 1987:9). The Islamization campaign in Pakistan seeks to curtail women’s rights. In reality, Islam is not who stands in the way of Muslim women participating in political life of their countries. It is rather the actions of certain Islamic doctrines combined with local customs that subjugated women did a consensus develop that in Islam women should be barred from politics (Mirgani).

In the elections 1965, Jinnah’s sister Fatima Jinnah was put out as the presidential candidate by COP which was condemned as un-Islamic on the grounds of her being a women (Jalal 1991:84f). Although Fatima’s candidature was characterized by elitism and appendage politics that belonged to family of a male politician. Moreover, the traditions included with Islamic sources most protected in General Ayub Khan’s military regime. Although Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the anti-Ayub and an emerged leader of down trodden and oppressed, introduced equal rights and opportunities to men and women through the Constitution of 1973 to eliminate the gender discrimination. All this became ironic, when he retained Islam the state religion (Article 2). In the Ayub’s regime women was not attempted to bring in the decision making stream. Besides being nominated, the number of seats reserved for women in the indirectly-elected Assembly remained limited. The principle of female suffrage on the basis of women’s territorial constituencies, adopted in the 1956 Constitution was abolished in Ayub’s Constitution of 1962 (Mumtaz and Shaheed 1987:13). Later on Zia-Ul-Haq’s military law was imposed with the alienation towards the Islamization of Pakistan and prohibition of women empowerment. The Constitution of 1973 brought more rights for women to mobilize them but it couldn’t reach at an expected status in socio-political field. In the period of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, a number of women’s groups emerged in overall socio-political context of progressive gender politics and worked hard for the women rights (Roces and Edwards 2010:172).

After a long journey of women activist’s efforts, the first lady prime minister of Pakistan Benazir Bhutto came to the top seat of the nation, who exemplified the great victory
of the feminist groups in the direction of women health, education, non-discrimination and participation in the wings of nation. Bhutto regime was a good hope for women in Pakistan who were veiled and homebound by virtue of their religion as well as gender and never thought of any change in their lives. Nevertheless, reality lies only in the patriarchal and elite relations of the country where no ordinary woman can contest any seat in the country politics. It is precisely the absence of an open political process that prevents Muslim women from assuming a greater role in public life in the ruling circles. Benazir Bhutto’s representation also exemplifies the patriarchal support behind a woman, as she belonged to the aristocratic Bhutto family.

Women Representation in the National Assembly of Pakistan:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr. No.</th>
<th>Legislatures</th>
<th>Total seats in Parliament</th>
<th>Women elected on General Seats</th>
<th>Women elected on Reserved Seats</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1947-54</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1955-58</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1962-65</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1965-69</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1972-77</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1977-77</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>1985-88</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
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<td>217</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>2002-08</td>
<td>342</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>61*</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>2008-13</td>
<td>342</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>2013-date</td>
<td>342</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>60*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Including one woman elected from seats reserved for non-Muslims

The bicameral national assembly of Pakistan has 342 members including 60 seats reserved for women and 10 for neo-Muslims (Article 51) allocated to each province on the basis of population. Second constituent assembly 1955 had established East and West Pakistan with 300 members in the unicameral parliament, divided equally between both the wings, in addition with 5 seats reserved for women for a period of 10 years in each. The Constitution of 1962 envisaged a Federal state with presidential form of government with 156 members of assembly and 3 seats reserved for women divided equally to both the states. In 1970 general elections, the assembly consisted of 313 members, 169 from East and 144 from West Pakistan including 13 reserved seats for women (6 from West and 7 from East Pakistan). The 1973 Constitution adopted bicameral assembly with 200 general seats and 10 seats reserved for women later in 1985. 10 reserved seats were added for women and 10 for minorities. This constitutional provision of 20 seats reserved for women lapsed in 1988 and as a result no women reserved seats in 1990, 1993 and 1997 elected assemblies. Elected government of both Prime ministers Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Shariff could neither revive these seats nor increase their number. These seats have been revived and substantially increased to the number of 60 by the government of General Parvez Musharraf in 2002.

When we undergo the parliamentary status of women in the house it reveals not a good example for female representation to establish equality and freedom to all in every step
of life, the basic values of a democratic nation. In Pakistan, although being provided the reserved seats in the house for women yet there has been numerically a least representation almost 68, about 19.9% out of 342 members. Many a times it happened to be no representation on general seats or on reserved seats too like in the year 1990, 1993, 1997, there had been no candidates elected on the reserved seats. Candidates have not been elected on the general seats more than 16 where in the general elections 2013 only 8 women have been elected on the general seats. Hence the women participation scene in the democracy is not satisfactory but in a trauma condition that needs to be improved by the people in power.

There is an old adage, “If gold rusts what will iron do”. Gender inequality starts right here; in the above democratic nations giving a very low power share of women, despite have a equal status in policy making. It should be the responsibility of political parties to check gender imbalance before forwarding names for a constituency.

**Reasons behind the women’s limited participation in electoral politics:**

1. Male control of party organizations and men having greater ability to build viable constituency and party support in favor of nomination.
2. Women’s lack of access to the kind of money and patronage that are increasingly crucial factors in candidate’s ability to win elections.
3. The aggressive electioneering tactics often employed which are likely to dissuade women from entering the fray.

**Conclusion:**

We cannot deny the fact that the participation of women in political process has been increasing of gradually. Women have proved themselves in decision making process and reached the highest level of power and authority. In India the demand of reservation for women in adequate proportion in various representative bodies is persistent. In this connection an important step has been the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendment bills which provide 1/3rd reservation of seats for women to be filled by election in Gram Panchayats and Municipalities respectively. Due to these bills more number of women is getting an opportunity to take part in decision–making process at grassroots level. These amendments are milestone in the way of a common woman whose participation is only towards her own family in the lack of education. They delivered the message among the society that women are the living beings to fly on their full wings of freedom and are equal participants of decision making them in spite of any patriarchal support of security.

Pakistan society is rapidly changing with more women contesting the public space with men. No party can ignore women’s causes without incurring political costs. The 2013 Pakistan general elections proved to be historic with high female political participation in the face of terrorist threats and some opposition to women’s involvement. Pakistani women have marked the importance of their role in the democratic process. But it should not be forget that a change cannot be brought in overnight. Overall status of girl education, gender ratio, health issues, political socialization and development are in trauma conditions in Pakistan as well as Bangladesh. Though both of these countries have document declarations of reserved indirect seats in their popular houses for women, there is a need of direct elections contested by women. They must be educated socially, economically and politically to use their rights and freedom, because the women empowerment a part of overall empowerment of a nation and further more the universe. The balanced participation of both men and women in decision making process is an essential requirement of democracy and positive steps for a society.
New mechanism and strategy needs to be developed to increase women’s access to decision making positions and opportunities in every walk of life:
- Women should form their own political parties to open the doors for women nominations for tickets liberally.
- Women support groups should be formed throughout the country to work as lobbying group in conjunction with political parties to support women to participate in politics.
- Women should organize and establish networks at different level to influence the decision process.
- Women in politics should be able to change both the political culture and laws to make sure the justice, equality and dignity for all the women.
- Reserved seats in the assemblies have introduced a gender perspective to policy making, but the mechanism for filling these seats needs tremendous improvement. Instead of electing women indirectly, parliament should consider introducing direct election for filling reserved seats for women.
- A woman obtaining high levels of office through family ties is that they are merely symbols and have no independent political experience, expertise or interest. So women representatives must be promoted to use their political rights on their own and should use their power on position to change the lives of women who they are representing. They must prove themselves the best example for them.
- India should also provide 33 percent quota in the central legislature to the women who are still apart from the mainstream. It can make a big opportunity for women to strengthen the Lok Sabha with 181 members.
- There should be a revolution of consciousness in the winds of women in the way they thought about themselves. They must realize about their constitutional and natural rights of equality. For when a women thrives, her family thrives, when family thrives, community flourish and the nation reaps the benefits.

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