

Oligarchic Patriarchal Political Culture of Women Participation in South Asia: With Special Reference to India, Bangladesh, Pakistan



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Abstract

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.

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. 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.

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).

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 Khalidazia 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.

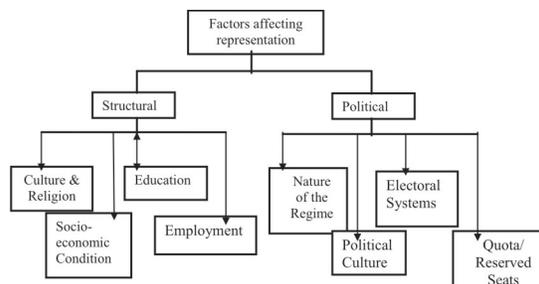
Gender Inequality Index 2012

Sr. No.	Country	HDI	HDI Value	GII Rank	GII Value	MMR	Female Seats in National Parliament (%)	Inequality life expectancy index value	Inequality adjusted education index value
1	Norway	1	0.955	5	0.065	7	39.6	0.928	0.968
2	Australia	2	0.938	17	0.115	7	29.2	0.93	0.965
3	USA	3	0.937	42	0.256	21	17	0.863	0.941
4	UK	26	0.875	34	0.205	12	22.1	0.903	0.806
5	South Africa	121	0.629	90	0.462	300	41.1	0.376	0.558
6	India	136	0.554	132	0.61	200	10.9	0.525	0.264
7	Bangladesh	146	0.515	111	0.518	240	19.7	0.595	0.252
8	Pakistan	146	0.515	123	0.567	260	21.1	0.487	0.217

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

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.

Causal Factors of Women Representation:



Status of Women in the Indian Ruling Structure

In Indian society the status of women has changed from 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 changed 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. 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.

Representation of Women in the Indian Politics

India's bicameral legislature consists of a 545 strong lower house and a 250 member in 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)

Sr. No.	Year	Total Members	Total women members	% of women Members out of total
1	1952	499	24	4.81
2	1957	500	24	4.8
3	1962	503	36	7.2
4	1967	523	32	6.1
5	1971	521	27	5.2
6	1977	544	21	3.9
7	1980	544	32	5.9
8	1984	544	45	8.3

Sr. No.	Year	Total Members	Total women members	% of women Members out of total
9	1989	517	28	5.4
10	1991	544	42	7.7
11	1996	544	41	7.5
12	1998	543	44	8.1
13	1999	543	52	9.6
14	2004	545	52	9.5
15	2009	545	59	10.8
16	2014	543	62	11.4

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 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

Sr. No.	Year of Election	Women elected among all elected MPs (%)	Reserved seats for women (%)	Total women in parliament (%)
1	1973	0	5	4.8
2	1979	0.7	0	9.7
3	1986	1.7	10	10.6
4	1988	1.3	-	1.3
5	1991	1.7	10	10.6
6	1996	2.3	10	11.2
7	2001	2	-	2
8	2009	5.4	14	20
9	2014	5.5	14	19.1

Pakistan Political phase and Women's active role

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 home bound 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

Sr. No.	Legislatures	Total seats in Parliament	Women elected on General Seats	Women elected on Reserved Seats
1	1947-54	30	-	-
2	1955-58	80	-	-
3	1962-65	156	6	-
4	1965-69	156	6	-
5	1972-77	144	6	-
6	1977-77	210	1	10
7	1985-88	217	1	21
8	1988-90	217	4	20
9	1990-93	217	2	-
10	1993-96	217	4	-
11	1997-99	217	6	-
12	2002-08	342	13	61*
13	2008-13	342	16	57
14	2013-date	342	8	60*

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

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 inadequate 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 furthermore 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:

- (i) Women should form their own political parties to open the doors for women nominations for tickets liberally.
- (ii) 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.

- (iii) Women should organize and establish networks at different level to influence the decision process.
- (iv) 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.
- (v) 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.
- (vi) 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.
- (vii) 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.
- (viii) 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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