

Conclusions & Suggestions

The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution. The Constitution grants equality to women and also empowers the state to adopt measures for welfare, development and empowerment of women. Importantly, laws, development policies, plans and programmes have been launched for women's advancement in different spheres. The National Policy for Women 2001 also aimed at bringing about the advancement, development and empowerment of women. However, Muslim women in India have been playing a subordinate role though Constitution of India establishes a secular state and eliminating discrimination on ground of race, religion, sex, etc. Muslim women continue to be victim of traditional social structure of the community. It is also evident from the fact that education has not spread much among the Muslim females. Moreover, women's participation in economic and political spheres is very limited and social customs are unfavourable and discriminatory against Muslim women. Due to the impact of modernization, westernization, democracy, socio-economic changes, legal enactments pertaining to Muslim women, society is advancing towards gender just and equity, giving the way to empowerment and advancement of Muslim women in India.

Women and the family are the foundations of the Islamic community and thus the religious text has plenty of references for women. Islam provides a complete code of conduct for its adherence. The followers of the Islam are divided into Shia and Sunni. The personal law of Muslims is applied to marriage, dower (mehr), dissolution of marriage, guardianship and maintenance etc. Marriage under the Islamic law is a contract and important family affair arranged by the elders in the family. However, marriage restrictions are there. A Muslim

woman cannot marry to a non-Muslim man while cousin marriage is preferred in the Muslim society. In certain cases a Muslim man may have marriage more than once. The dowry system is prevalent in the society; however the dower is given by the bridegroom to the bride. While in other societies dower is supposed to be provided by the parents of bride. The code of conduct related to Zakat, Namaz, Talaq and Roza is important dimension of Muslim personal law.

South Asia is one of the least developed region in terms of human development despite the fact that one fifth of humanity is residing here. Societies are still transitional, under developed and parochial. Discrimination on the basis of caste, creed and gender is fairly common here. Women in South Asia are no exception.

Allocation of reserved seats at all levels in decision making bodies by the government along with the efforts to empower women socially economically and politically are the measures being taken by the government under the pressure of women movements and the international conventions on women rights. Now the question of women empowerment has been transformed to that of overall development of the nation. It is on the basis of realization that how the sustainable development can be made without participation of half of the population. Prosperous and empowered woman would prove to be the best custodian of the new generation and her mainstreaming in national life is equally important for the development of new generation.

Women issues can be rightly addressed with the considerable presence of women in the legislative and decision making institutions. Allocation of seats at the governmental level, recruitment at the political party level, support from media and civil society all are required and appreciated in this regard. Women are not living in isolation. They are part of society. They need support of their family, especially the males. So we have to work on society as a whole to change the mindset of the

people to accept an empowered women, sister, and daughters. The high level of literacy, economic opportunity, and prosperity in the society and regular workings of the representative institutions will broaden the horizon of people and they will accept the mainstreaming of women as the part of progress and modernization.

Women are seen in stereotype role in the society but it is not only reserved for women. Men also have to face this dilemma which distracts the process of getting equality. There are social pressures on men also to demonstrate their masculinity, keeping control on their women, violence against them, not to let them go outside, not accept their dominance in household or in decision-making regarding children and family affairs etc. Mostly these pressures are from the senior women of the family. There is a need to change the behaviour of society as a whole. For that purpose civil society, media and government have to join hands to launch a coordinated struggle. The steps being taken by the government to bring political empowerment of women can be a good start but real empowerment cannot be achieved without working both on men's and women's economic and social elevation as a whole.

The review of trends in the field of women's political empowerment shows a diverse progress report from different parts of the world. There are numerous difficulties still to be resolved. Targets set by United Nations for a 30 per cent which would eventually grow into 50 per cent participation has only been achieved in few countries. Some progress has been achieved over the past few years, towards enhancing women's political representation, as well as in the realization that women's involvement in politics is an important pre-requisite for democracy. Women are still facing key challenges.

The region of South Asia has had the largest number of female leaders but general trends do not show similarity in political participation of women. South Asia has been slow in the political empowerment of

women. In Pakistan, since independence, all regimes whether liberal, conservative or military have treated women's issues as political necessity only to project their regimes as liberal and modern to the world. These regimes gave limited rights to women for a place in society and politics. For instance, Ayub Khan introduced the Family Law Ordinance 1961, Zulfikar Bhutto's regime fixed 10 per cent quota for women in parliament, Benazir Bhutto's government established Women's Study Centre, First Women's Bank, and Women's Police Station. General Pervez Musharaf's era allocated the 33 per cent women seats in local government and 17 per cent seats in parliament. None of these regimes responded positively or responsibly to women's issues. Women's questions have been used to strengthen their own political agenda and to secure political points.

It has been observed that men support the case of women only when they think that the interests of men would be served profoundly. Many women elected in parliament belong to politicians who have been already in power in Pakistan previously. This trend may manipulate the process of change in the interest of power regimes. The initial status of this quota may provide a base for future strengthening of women's status in Pakistan but we need to go from gender sensitivity to encompass the dimensions of collective gender rights. Changes are to be brought from within if they are to be sustained.

Women lack interest in politics because politics is projected as a 'negative' field. Women do not have participation in formal political processes. Men consider themselves 'traditional custodians' of political heritage and do not welcome women's participation in important political decisions. The immediate problems that women face include lack of political skill, financial resources and the dubbing of politics as an all male arena. The ideal of increasing the level of women's representation and participation in decision-making bodies requires well-developed

strategies. It also seeks quality in women's representation, opportunities for women in formal education and training and scholarship grants to equip women to effectively participate in political activities.

One of the most important signs of the modernization of society is connected to the role of women in society. We cannot imagine a modern society without considering the status of women; we cannot imagine such a society if women do not enjoy their social, political, cultural and economic rights and if women have not achieved full dignity and social status. In relative terms, the status of women has improved in contemporary Pakistani society with the passage of time, but the ideal of women's empowerment is still a distant dream.

Suggestions:

- Participation of women in planning and decision-making still remains an area of neglect. The formal institution such as political parties, legislators, trade unions, cooperative, techno-bureaucracy, industry, trade and commerce reflect a very low level of participation of women particularly at more responsible positions. To resolve this problem and to initiate necessary policy initiatives, a comprehensive policy statement should be brought out both by the government and corporate sectors. This policy should focus on the reservation, entitlements and gender just equatous society.
- In order to encourage the entry of women in political institutions, it is necessary to ensure that an enabling environment is provided for women in the elected bodies and that their positions are not always threatened with premature removal from their posts. It is also suggested that severe measures to stop corruption, criminalisation and communalization of politics should be taken by the government.

- It is essential to introduce special mechanisms to induct women at all levels of decision-making to ensure, that they form a critical mass to contribute and influence administrative planning and policy measures. It is imperative to organize orientation, training and capacity building programmes for all elected women representatives in order to make capable them regarding the active participation in decision making process and taking the responsibilities in developmental planning.
- There is need to modernize the traditional institutions of education serving the Muslim community. Muslims need vocational training, entrepreneurship skills and managerial efficiency for running their self-employment enterprises and thus, traditional institutions are to be strengthened and promoted for delivering such services to the Muslim society.
- It is imperative to enact the 85th Constitutional Amendment Bill pending in the Indian Parliament, providing reservation for women, thereby involving women in the political and decision making arenas. Thus providing space for women to ensure their concerns and perspectives are incorporated while strategizing and planning for action.
- Awareness and sensitization should be created amongst women through mass media about the electoral process and also the candidates contesting for election, thereby eliminating powerful men taking advantage of the ignorance of women and controlling their decisions in exercising their right to vote.
- A decentralised mechanism of a Women's Rights Commission may be setup with representation of the enforcement agencies, judiciary, bureaucracy, women's movement/NGOs and the media beginning at the local, state and federal level, instead of a

Commissioner for Women's Rights to check the growing violence against women.

- Political parties must ensure their election manifesto promise of reserving 33 per cent seats for women in the State Assemblies and Parliament be fulfilled. Within the political party hierarchy, there should be efforts to have at least a minimum of 33 per cent women in all levels of decision-making.
- In order to enhance the existing training for elected women representatives in terms of content. The package must address the gender responsiveness and issues affecting the lives of women, in addition to the necessary input of the functional responsibilities that would enable women to govern effectively.
- Interviews and panel discussions with successful women in politics at all levels are highlighted in visual media to motivate other women to enter/sustain their interest in politics. The documentation of successful women in politics be ensured and disseminated effectively so that young women may take interest for the entry in politics.
- In order to get more women into the political parties, mobilisation public opinion and raising awareness by disseminating related information is called for. Building and strengthening women's constituencies is suggested to enable women to represent them in decision making bodies in parties.
- Women in Pakistan need to ensure that their gains from the women's quota are not lost. To do this they need to join civil society organizations and pressure the government to make the quotas for local government permanent and to initiate quota systems in provincial and national assembly.

- Considerable organizational work needs to be undertaken to raise the awareness of women in the community on how to use the local government as an institution to create their interest. For this they need to be made more aware of how to identify the issues of common concerns and to collectively put pressure on the local bodies to address these issues. They must also learn how to make the local government more responsive and accountable to them. This requires them to understand the functioning of the local Government and how to generate the pressure on them to respond positively.
- In order to ensure that the women councillors elected for the first time are provided training regarding their duties and responsibilities so that they may perform efficiently.
- A women's caucus has been established in the Pakistan Parliament, however, the Government needs to ensure that it is also represented by women from religious minorities.
- For women's full and equal participation in decision-making structures and processes at all levels of governance to be attained, a strategic framework is needed which explores ways of overcoming the cultural and structural barriers to gender balance in political representation.
- Advocacy for policy reform in political parties, electoral systems and campaign finance is recommended as the best possible way to overcome structural obstacles. Other strategic methods are also suggested to address the cultural barriers in the full exercise of women's citizenship: awareness-raising, capacity-building and research and documentation.
- A nationwide information campaign highlighting the importance of women's representation and participation in decision-making; the

transformational politics the women can create; and women's political participation as a basic human right is suggested.

- It would be wise to consider a three-phased training programme encompassing the whole range of women's citizenship as voters, candidates and elected officials. This training could also include messages about voter rights; young women's leadership training; how to run and win as candidates; and skill-building for women elected in the local councils, and the provincial and national assembly. The skills covered should include developing a policy agenda; how to articulate social aspirations and the art of negotiation; influencing and shaping policy decisions, and how to allocate financial resources.
- In order to ensure that women make a difference, their hard work in building an institution's rules, practices, and norms as well as policy decisions should be documented.
- Three important areas for policy advocacy to enhance women's political participation are democratization of political parties; quotas as temporary special measures to achieve gender balance; and campaign finance reform.
- A societal reorientation for gender just society would require a radical transformation through awareness on gender issues and sustained efforts of imparting training and education on various developmental activities. Women's own perceptions about themselves also need to be changed; besides a positive role played by media and related organizations.
- An effective support mechanism is needed at the grass root level to ensure that policies of rights, entitlements and ownership of land are made sustainable.

- Women's political participation is not only about increasing their numbers but also their effectiveness and impact. Women should be able to participate in open, transparent, accountable decision-making processes of policymaking institutions and mechanisms not as beneficiaries and objects of development programs but as agents or subjects of developmental change. Their effectiveness is indicated by the extent to which they are able to influence institutional rules, norms and practices and consequently shape the policy agenda and decisions about the use and allocation of resources. Their impact on the other hand will be seen in the entitlements, capabilities and rights they are able to secure for women to redress gender disparities and change their lives, especially for women living in poverty.