



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Role of Education in Political Empowerment of Women in Pakistan during Musharraf Regime**

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**ABSTRACT**

The study aims to analyze the contribution of education to women's political empowerment under the Musharraf government (1999–2008). The study also aims to emphasize the hyperlink between education and political representation by examining educational changes and how they affect women's political empowerment. The qualitative research method with secondary data sources has been employed. These sources include policy papers, research articles, research journals, books, media accounts, and feminist theoretical frameworks. Results show that although Musharraf's government's educational programs gave women more political opportunities, institutional and cultural constraints still prevented them from achieving full empowerment. Lack of education in women impairs their capacity for clear communication, reduces their understanding of political procedures, and makes them less conscious of their rights and responsibilities. Women's inadequate access to education in Pakistan is a key barrier to their political participation and decision-making. Education is crucial for empowering individuals, fostering their abilities, and expanding their opportunities for leadership and public affairs engagement.

**KEYWORDS** Decision Making, Democracy, Gender Equality, Political Participation, Political Parties, Women Education, Women Empowerment

**Introduction**

The concept of 'women empowerment' is a contentious subject worldwide. Women's roles in the formation of states are seen as crucial to socioeconomic advancement and to the expansion and advancement of civilizations around the nations. This article analyses how education contributed to women's political empowerment in Pakistan during the Musharraf regime. Islamization during Zia-ul-Haq's rule strengthened the foundations of masculine power and gender inequality in the community by endorsing false notions of Islam about the subjugation and control of women. The governments of the post-Zia era responded favorably in this direction after acknowledging the value of women in the development of a nation. Musharraf valued women's empowerment as crucial to the nation's economic stability and prosperity. The initiatives and changes implemented to empower women during Musharraf's reign had the potential to be successful despite opposition from a variety of social, religious, and political groups. Previous administrations were unable to enact programs that provided education, health, justice, and respect due to a lack of support from society and politics. The report recommends improving policies to educate and defend women's rights, promoting equitable participation in society and contributing to the country's growth (Akram, Azhar & Basit, 2020; Ahmed, Muzaffar, Javaid & Fatima, 2015).

By definition, Empowerment refers to strengthening individuals' or groups' ability to make decisions and achieve desired objectives. (Afzal, Ali, Ahmad, Zafar, &

Niazi, 2009). Women's empowerment refers to enhancing a woman's ability to make informed decisions in situations where she was previously unable to do so (Kabeer, 1999). Hence, it is indisputable that the idea of education's role in empowering women has been considered as essential to the modern world's processes of social and economic advancement (Chaudhry, 2007).

The idea of women's empowerment is relatively new in the fields of gender studies and political science. Though Plato is regarded as the first feminist for insisting on the same educational system for men and women, women were not even regarded as citizens throughout the Greek era. Women's empowerment is defined as their capacity to influence social, political, and economic spheres as well as their ability to make and carry out decisions. The ideas of feminism, which is not a single notion but rather a collection of thinkers working to advance women's rights, gave rise to the idea of women's empowerment. These theories all share the goal of eliminating gender discrimination from society. This article explores how education and socio-cultural variables impact women's empowerment in Pakistan.

### **Literature Review**

Women's education has been a contentious issue in Pakistan for many years. There are still several obstacles preventing women from accessing school, especially in spite of government initiatives to raise the literacy rate and support education. This study examines the obstacles to and prospects for women's education in Pakistan, as well as strategies for addressing them.

Pakistani administrations have historically prioritized empowering women in politics. Considerable efforts were made in this direction. Women were given a record-breaking 20% of seats in the Musharraf regime three-quarters of municipal bodies, the provincial assembly, and the parliament. It is believed that every person has the fundamental right to an education. However, women have no access to this fundamental right in many countries throughout the world, including Pakistan. In accordance with the Pakistan Education Statistics Report 2019-20, women's literacy rate is at 59% in Pakistan, a much lower figure than men's (71%)<sup>1</sup>. There are several factors contributing to this discrepancy, such as poverty, cultural standards, and a lack of educational resources. This study will look at the potential and problems facing women's education in Pakistan as well as approaches to these problems (UNDP, 2005).

Women's empowerment implies a more prominent position for women in society. The idea of equal opportunity for men and women without regard to gender is a comprehensive phenomenon. Women's empowerment aims to improve their socioeconomic condition and political engagement, promoting gender balance. It is widely acknowledged that women who are empowered politically are better able to participate in policy making in an appropriate way (Begum, 2023).

Empowerment refers to the balance between weakness and power in interpersonal relationships. Marginalized and neglected populations in a state are given a fair share of decision-making that affects their life. Empowering a sector of society requires effective social management tactics. Thus, from a theoretical and practical standpoint, women's empowerment entails a quick fix to reduce vulnerabilities in order to increase the possibilities and resources available to women. Women are exceptional social change agents because of this, depending on the circumstances surrounding their advocacy (Khan, & Naqvi, 2020)

The 1956 Constitution also included the provision for women to have reserved seats. A study of property rights for women, guardianship of children, marriage, haq mehar, and separate living arrangements was one of the commission's goals. The Rashid Commission was established in 1951 in response to women's demands for changes to family laws and to address valid societal concerns that affect women. The creation of "The Muslim Family Regulations Statute 1961," which mandated marriage and divorce enlistment with the important Association Committee, was another political endeavor undertaken by women in Pakistani history (Socoroo, 2002; Critelli, 2010; Himan & Kashif, 2017).

Women's social empowerment is a widely debated problem in socio-economic development, both globally and nationally. The UN and other humanitarian organisations prioritise empowering women and promoting gender equality globally. Women's socioeconomic position varies across social classes, geographical locations, ethnicity, urban and rural origin, tribal or caste culture, and societal structures such as feudalism or industrialization. Because wealthy family members support women's engagement in entrepreneurship and because they have access to educational possibilities, women from this class generally have more options when it comes to pursuing economic prospects.

Women's position varies among countries due to the lack of a universally accepted definition. One way to look at it is as a combination of several statuses, some high and others poor. Female children have inferior status and fewer rights than their male counterparts. Pakistan's gender disparities stem from social, economic, and cultural barriers. Although it is widely acknowledged that one of the main objectives of development is the empowerment of women, there are a lot of obstacles because of the socio-cultural and religious aspects of a nation like Pakistan. Even though Pakistan is an Islamic state, Sharia rules cannot be enforced since cultural values often take precedence over religious ones (Allauddin, Khan & Rind, 2020).

General Pervez Musharraf held onto power in November 1999 by announcing the fourth military regulation in Pakistan's concise history. In a clear overthrow against the chosen state leader who had deserted Islamic Jihad in Kashmir, General Pervez Musharraf communicated his disappointment with Pakistan's past way of dealing with managing the Taliban. All of the extremist groups, restrained by Deobandi and their jihadi offshoots, had been trying to stir up a rebellion against a Washington State-friendly and pro-Indian leader who might obstruct the funding source that had propelled them forward and made them powerful.

General Musharraf aimed to support a liberal and inconspicuous Pakistan at the world stage. He was presented with an excellent opportunity to remove the radical elements during the "Battle on Dread." A whole new stance was adopted in terms of global strategy, and General Musharraf started enforcing his standards within. He sought to realise his concept of 'Illuminated Control'. This vision encompasses the promotion of liberal values, the implementation of a new educational system, and the arrangement of Pakistan's sensitive image on a worldwide scale, the political rights of women, and the advancement of innovation in the state's electronic media. Though Islam promotes social equality for both men and women, misogyny in Pakistan occasionally affects women's rights. Pakistani society instills in girls deference to men, including their father, brothers, and spouses. Females often rely on males for crucial decisions such as school, profession, marriage, family size, and moving out. In Pakistan, gender discrimination is especially pervasive in rural and isolated areas (Syed, Tabassum, & Afzal, 2013).

The current situation of women's education in Pakistan is concerning and distressing. Women's participation in education and the development of higher education may mutually support one another, resulting in the success and advancement of the female population. Reduced social mobility, unbalanced income distribution, low labour force participation, and unfair home chore sharing are all consequences of restricted access to education. Women have restricted access to education overall. Although the government has made great efforts to enhance educational possibilities for girls and women, obstacles to growth still exist. Compared to their male colleagues, women are still under-represented in higher education and are less likely to finish their degrees (Weiss, 2012).

The enrolment rates of females in secondary schools decrease significantly as they progress in their education, indicating potential problems with the accessibility and availability of secondary schools for girls. Static and dynamic concepts may be used to convey the empowerment notion (Mathur & Agarwal, 2017). The concept of empowerment is related to power and focuses on whether women can make decisions and influence their own lives (Haq, Jali, & Islam, 2016).

Women face disempowerment not just owing to a lack of knowledge about their rights, but also due to discriminatory economic, social, and cultural behaviors that perpetuate inequality in society. To put it another way, women who lack authority might get it by receiving it externally. Empowerment is a process that women can obtain over time as individuals or groups. It is not a gift. Empowerment refers to the 'inner voice' for personal development; it refers to the 'power-within'. Internal initiatives, or "bottom-up" strategies, are referred to as intrinsic empowerment strategies. To improve women's economic standing, both kinds of policies must be used in concert (Shabir, & Mahmood, 2020).

General Pervaiz Musharraf endorsed the "Devolution Plan 2001". By providing 33% of women's representation in local state-run administrations like as town halls, association boards, area committees, and tehsil chambers, it strengthened women's political collaboration. In the past, 20007 women were selected for the Punjab Association Chamber, 6498 for the Sindh Association Board, 3963 for the KPK Association Committee (formerly the NWFP), and 2374 for the Baluchistan Association Assembly. Women comprised 18% of the Senate and 21.6% of the Public Assembly, respectively. This was a move in the right direction towards giving women's viewpoints greater weight in regulations pertaining to them, even if there was a very little section for them. Furthermore, he considered women's violence against them in the highest regard. This was significant in light of the Beijing Platform for Action, the General Declaration of Basic Rights, and the Conference on the Elimination of All Forms of Female Victimization (CEDAW), which Pakistan's government has supported from about 1996 (Awan & Muhammad, 2018).

Empowering women is a key approach for individual, family, community, and national well-being, as well as sustainable development. Poor nations must prioritize people-centered development. The current study therefore aims to provide a comprehensive overview of Pakistan's background and attempt to explain how conventional sociocultural elements, such as access to assets, decent labour, and educational limits, are impacting women's empowerment (Bibi, A. (2021).

In October 1999, a military coup brought General Pervez Musharraf to power. His approach is viewed as the education on women's rights that followed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. General Musharraf implemented his "Edified Modernization" strategy with the true

intention of gaining the approval of women. The regime of General Musharraf took measures to improve the precarious status of women in Pakistan. General Musharraf was granted public power to improve on the standing and status of women in the state. His approach makes several efforts at drives and activities aimed at freeing women from the confines that held them back so they might advance more quickly. (Yilmaz, 2016; Yilmaz & Ahmed, 2018; Noreen & Musarrat, 2014).

Furthermore, before the 2002 election, the proportion of women was increased to 17% in both public and private congregations (61 out of 342 members of the public gathering were women). Women's participation in politics was enhanced overall for the 2002 election thanks to a significant increase in the quota. A total of 188 women ran for general seats in the 2002 election; 101 of them were chosen by political parties, and 39 of these women were elected to the seats that they were running for. Comparing this to the 1997 election, the ratio was close to 1/3: only 56 women ran for office, 39 of them were selected by political parties, and only 7 of them were successful (Khattak, 2010; Khan & Naqvi, 2020).

### **Material and Methods**

This research paper aims to examine the impact of education on Pakistani women's involvement in politics and decision-making, as well as the challenges they encounter. This study explains women's helplessness via both descriptive and exploratory methods. It is qualitative research, based on many perspectives and opinions. Secondary sources offered sufficient information to finish this study. Secondary sources used in this study included academic books, research journals, magazines, newspapers, internet publications, and official reports. Research data compiled from mandatory and optional sources were examined utilizing a content research technique, assisting in bringing a significant issue into focus.

### **Results and Discussion**

Public Arrangement 2002 was created by General Musharraf to empower women and eliminate discriminatory attitudes towards them in Pakistan. His approach initiated the use of family courts to settle cases of violence against women. A first in Pakistani history in 2000, during the military regime, funding for women's political interest was increased to 33% at the local government level. At three levels of the local government – the association committee, the tehsil 9, and the area level in particular – this amount was significant.

From the available data, it is possible to conclude that women's ambiguous status in all spheres of life has had a negative influence and is undoubtedly the root cause of Pakistan's negative international perception of fundamental rights of education, particularly the weak status of women. Even though General Musharraf's administration has been in power up till now, he tested and energized the political fight for women's empowerment.

Women in Pakistan have several hurdles in acquiring access to education. Cultural norms, poverty, a lack of educational resources, financial limitations, and security concerns are some of these difficulties. Early marriage is a serious barrier to women's education, since 21% of girls marry before reaching 18, which increases the dropout rate. In Pakistan, women's education has garnered political attention in the past few decades. Concerns have been raised over the sluggish pace and delay in expanding women's educational options. The importance of Pakistani women's education has

increased as a result of the growing body of information on the subject. Pakistan now has one of the lowest percentages of female literacy (25%) of any Asian nation, and it is just somewhat better than the average for the world (24%). Women's education may not be enough to fix the issue, but it might be a contributing factor.

The study's findings show that women in Pakistan always encounter barriers to active participation in political matters and that these barriers stem from real, social, and institutional factors. In addition, Pakistan's gender-biased education system is negatively impacted by the under-representation of women in politics, leading to limited diversity and inclusion. The evaluation notes that to remove these obstacles and create a more equal and delegated educational & political landscape in Pakistan, comprehensive action is necessary. Since women make up a sizable portion of Pakistan's overall population, their abilities and mentoring are crucial to creating a skilled and talented labor force. The advancement of HR as a whole can be aided by demonstrating how women are contributing to the prosperity and educational consequences of their families.

Transforming the school system and advancing orientation consideration were needs subject to Musharraf's authority, and this meaningfully affected ladies' liberation too. Various activities were finished to support female enrolment in training and proficiency. The 2001 Public Schooling Strategy tried to expand admittance to training, especially for females. It contained measures to ensure that females are signed up for essential training, give grants and open up extra schools for them.

Musharraf's plan provided political numbers for women as part of a larger effort to increase women's participation in the political sphere seats for women at the administration level were held after the Nearby Government Statute of 2001. In local assemblies, a certain number of seats were reserved for women, which effectively increased the representation of women in politics.

Education had a role in helping women become more media-literate and empowered to fight for the rights of women. Beneficial reforms made it possible for women to access information through the media, which raised awareness of their political rights and the importance of political engagement. Educated women, often hailing from urban areas or having pursued higher education, shown greater vibrancy in common society, advocating for improved political representation, rational modifications, and consistency in direction.

The country's goal for women's political empowerment was pushed by the rise of an enlightened and active female in the community. Many educated women become involved in NGOs and other advocacy groups in order to advocate for legal and political reforms. The 2002 General Decisions also provided reserved seats for women in the Public Gathering, marking a significant step in the expansion of women's political support. These numbers enabled a new generation of educated women to pursue careers in politics, providing opportunities for them to contribute to dynamic cycles at all levels of governance.

Orientation Delicate Educational plan with an end goal to address laid out orientation standards and support ladies' contribution in all circles of public and political life, endeavors were made to carry out a more orientation comprehensive educational plan. Influence on Political Strengthening; women presently have more noteworthy admittance to training and the data and capacities expected to effectively participate in governmental issues more proficiently.

The role of women is critical for the economic turn of events. Women who are educated and have the opportunity to work can contribute to efficiency and economic growth. Ladies frequently begin to lead the pack in friendly advancement activities such as community development, medical services, and training. Engaged women may influence improvements in areas such as access to basic amenities, hygiene, and child and mother health.

## **Conclusion**

Pakistan's political history has always used Islam as a tool to win over the populace. Islamic teachings about the education of women and their roles in families and society were misinterpreted as a result. Islam is the only religion on the earth that has stood up for the rights of weaker segments of society, particularly women and children, as is abundantly clear by studying the religion. Islam does not allow for the separation of women; contrary, it has granted women advantages and positions. However, rigid scholars are excluding women from society by enforcing dual rules; this is due to their predilection for rigid ways of thinking.

Persistent and significant progress should be made towards boosting the prevalence of women in educational institutions, in politics, as well as their involvement as elected officials in legislative bodies. Women with strong political backgrounds are becoming increasingly visible in Pakistan, yet it remains difficult for ordinary women to join in politics. Even while the current situation is far from perfect, it stays reasonably acceptable when compared to the rest of the world, particularly the Muslim world. Many Pakistani women are not inclined to pursue high-quality education. Their lack of knowledge inhibits their ability to communicate effectively, suppresses their awareness of political cycles, and lessens their awareness of their rights and obligations. Women's limited access to education in Pakistan is a major barrier to their political engagement and leadership. Education is essential to involving people, developing their talents, and increasing their chances of leadership and participation in public projects (Torlak & Kuzey, 2019)

## **Recommendations**

The accompanying suggestions expect to handle the snags and troubles experienced by Pakistani women:

- By empowering women's education and raising information on their abilities, orientation generalizations and ladies' privileges might be raised about.
- Women's confidence and decision-making abilities may be increased via empowerment programs that provide training, skill development, and leadership opportunities.
- Women's involvement can be increased and discriminatory conduct can be prevented by enacting and upholding gender-sensitive rules and regulations.
- Establishing programs that help women advance their education and skill sets can empower them to participate more actively in decision-making.
- The media's role is to debunk stereotypes and highlight the importance of education of women and their leadership in political decision-making.
- Raising awareness about the harmful impact of violence and harassment on women's political participation can put pressure on society to stop allowing such conduct.
- Women's political engagement and gender equality might potentially influence males, religious leaders, and community leaders' opinions.

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