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A Study on Factors Affecting the Women's Political Participation in Azad Jammu & Kashmir

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Abstract: Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJ&K) (Pakistan-administered Azad Kashmir) is actually a part of the disputed State of Jammu & Kashmir. The total population of AJ&K is 4,319,394, and the female population is about 2, 211,445. The AJ&K interim constitution of 1970 unlocked political activities by introducing political reforms and a quota system for women in the legislative assembly. Later, the interim constitution of 1974 guaranteed the political participation of women by increasing the quota in the legislative assembly. Currently, women occupy a larger section of the population, and their political participation is less than that of male representation. Despite the constitutional arrangements to support women's participation, financial resources, political parties' dealing with female members, cultural bindings, male ascendancy, and less priority to women in the decision-making process of parties, family issues are the factors that create hurdles for women to actively take part in politics of AJ&K. This paper analyses the factors that affect women's representation in the political system. As such, this study is an endeavor to examine the participation of women in AJ&K politics and concurrently highlight the hindrances and challenges that affect women's participation in politics.

Key Words: AJ&K Politics, Women, Political Participation, Factors

Introduction

Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJ&K) is a liberated part of the disputed State of J&K, administered by Pakistan. AJ&K and Pakistan are separate entities, yet tied with each other via political arrangements rather than any border like other nations. The relationships between the two regions are highly ambiguous since it has never been defined in "classical" legal terms. AJ&K is neither a nation-state nor a province of Pakistan but rather a "provisional" political entity, which features aspects of both autonomy from and dependence on Pakistan (P. Schild, 2015). The AJ&K has a separate interim constitution, legislative assembly, and political system. However, affairs of all kinds are governed by Pakistan and run by the local people of AJ&K. The total population of this region is 4,319,394, of which 2 211,445 (more than 51%) are female (P&DD, 2022). On 24th October 1947, the 'provisional government' Azad Government of the State of Jammu & Kashmir was created by resistance leadership, and after its formation, the government of Pakistan recognized it by providing all means of administrative support through the instrument of Karachi Agreement of 1949. This agreement gave power to Pakistan over the political, economic, and financial affairs of AJ&K and allowed it to negotiate over the Kashmir dispute internationally (Lamb, 1998). To run the administrative and political affairs within AJ&K, written principles were introduced in 1950 by the name of Rules of Business (ROB), later revised in 1952 and 1957. Till 1960, the people of this region were politically underrepresented, and there was no structured political system that could nurture the political culture in AJ&K. However, in 1960, the Basic Democrats System (BDS) was introduced in Pakistan was implemented in AJ&K. This effort towards the democratic setup opened the venues for the people to exercise their right to vote, 'votes of basic democrats' for the first time Presidential Elections were acquainted with an additional body known as AJ&K State Council (Hayat, 2020). Later, the main constitutional reforms were introduced in 1970 when a democratic setup was presented through an adult franchise system under which a legislative assembly consisting of 24 members was elected based on the adult surface. In this assembly, only a female politician was nominated after 23 years after the establishment of the AJ&K government. In 1974, the prime

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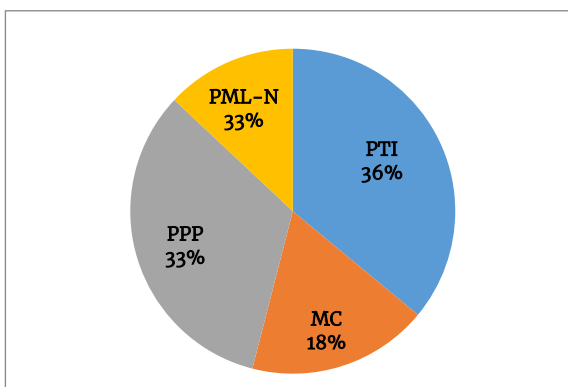
ministerial form of government was introduced, and multi-party elections were held for the first time in AJ&K. The interim agreements of 1970 and 1974 and constitutional amendments of 1985 allocated quotas for women; however, their representation in the AJ&K legislative assembly is only 10%, and it shows gender imbalance in terms of representation of women.

The representation of women on reserved seats shows that from 1970 to 2020, only five seats were reserved for women, which shows even less political representation of women in the legislative assembly. This trend directly affects the interests, participation, and opportunities of women in politics. Moreover, in parallel to the AJ&K legislative assembly, there is another nominated body known as the Kashmir Council, but it has no representation of women. (Sekhawat, 2007). In fact, the political participation of women has been renowned as a vital degree of eminence to fulfill the criteria of democracy and is also crucial to bringing women into the democratic process, thus making the political culture more representative and accommodating. In the least politically developed and male-dominated societies, women have less political involvement in politics, decision-making, and legislation as compared to their male counterparts, which has negative implications when it comes to decision-making, and their underrepresentation in policymaking institutions means that women's interests are underrepresented. (Tremblay, 1998 and Devlin & Elgie, 2008). But in the context of AJ&K, according to the proportion of the female population. Neither the representation of women in the assembly is fair according to the population ratio nor largely showing interest in taking part in politics, which is instigated by various factors. The objective of this article is to shed light on factors that have halted the effective participation and successful representation of women in the politics of AJ&K.

Methodology

The paper studies factors affecting the political participation of women in AJ&K in terms of their participation in politics and representation in the legislative assembly based on both primary and secondary sources of data. The obtained data has scrutinized the factors, such as the absence of local bodies elections, familial politics, traditional and dynastic politics, family pressure, economic factors, political parties' attitude towards women political workers, male dominance, harassment of female political workers and cultural barriers, family issues are the main contributors to the prevailing status quo position of women political participation. Data for analysis of factors was collected through structured questionnaires from elected and political representatives and political members of political parties using quantitative and qualitative methods. Two types of questionnaires were prepared to get the information. An open-ended questionnaire for Member Legislative Assembly MLAs and a closed-ended questionnaire for members of political parties. Initially, we aimed to collect the responses of 20 female members of 4 political parties from each district, but 20 members from each district did not respond, so ten members from each district were selected in the sample. For the collection of responses, the respondents/members were selected randomly from different political parties to cover the required data and opinions on the difficulties faced by women politicians. The sample included 100 female political workers, divided into ten from each district from different political parties, as shown in the figure below. It was also very difficult to fill out the questionnaire from MLAs as it was sent to too many current and ex-MLAs, but very few of them responded positively.

Respondents from Different Political Parties



Source: The survey was conducted through a questionnaire

Inclusion of Women in the Political System of AJ&K

Azad Jammu and Kashmir have predominantly a patriarchal society, and the societal structure is bounded by cultural norms. More than 70% of the population is made up of villagers and strictly follows the cultural and traditional norms, and the head of the family is solely responsible for all the decisions. In this situation, it was strange for women to go out of their homes, do any work, or join politics. In regard to participation in politics, in the beginning, only women from families of political backgrounds started to work in social activities. Later, with gradual changes, the women started to be part of politics with their men. The organization for women, named Anjuman-e-, aims to bring socio-political awareness among women and make efforts to financially empower them women. The educated women in this association used to teach other women about their rights and the value of women's empowerment. Meanwhile, the constitutional framework of 1970 was the first time the political representation participation of women appeared. Begam Saeeda Khanam was honored as the first female member of the legislative assembly, and she represented the women of AJ&K in the assembly with a firm stand and set an example for other women to become part of politics (AJ&K Assembly Publication, 2006). In 1974, the multi-party system and changes in the form of government and political system from presidential to parliamentary system became major developments to encourage female participation in politics. After these changes, the women of this region were able to represent themselves on the floor of the national assembly, and pioneer members struggled for the expansion of women's participation in politics. For example, MS. Saeda Khanum in 1970, MS. Begam Zammurad Shareef, and MS. Farhat Shaheen in 1975 took a firm stand and made affirmative action towards the political representation of women of AJ&K. although, later, all the political parties created space for women to fulfill the basic criteria of democracy. However, the political participation of women is underrepresented, and the participation of women at the party and legislative level is also minimal compared to the female population of the region concerned. The following table divulges the names of those women who got the chance to become Assembly members.

Table 1

Historic representation of women politicians in AJ&K legislative assembly

Year	Reserved Seats	Direct Election Contest	Name of Women MLAs Elected on Reserved Seats
1970	01	Nil	MS. Saeeda Khanam
1975-77	02	Nil	Begam Zammurad Shareef and Farhat Shaheen.
1985-90	05	Nil	Kaneez Fatima, Atiya Sadiq, Naheed Tariq, Shereen Waheed, and Noreen Arif.
1990-91	05	Nil	Naheed Tariq, Shereen Waheed, Suriya Khursheed, Shameem Manzar, Muneera Parveen.
1996-2001	05	Nil	Shugufta Yasmeen Butt, Zammurad Shareef, Saeeda Gul, Shameem Manzar, Noreen Arif.
2001-2006	05	Nil	Shehzada Kousar Gillani, Shereen Waheed, Gulzar Fatima, Naheed Tariq, Noreen Arif.
2006-2011	05	Nil	Fouzia Ashraf, Shazia Khatoon, Shamim Ali, Mehar-Un-Nisa, Naheed Tariq, Nasreen Rani,
2011-2016	05	MS. Farzana Yaqoob	Farzana Yaqoob, Mehar-Ul-Nisa, Sadaf Sheikh, Shazia Khatoon, Shaheen Kousar Dar
2016-21	05	MS. Noreen Arif	Noreen Arif, Rifat Aziz, Sehrish Qamar, Shazia Akbar, Faiza Imtiaz, Naseema Khatoon.
2021--- continue	05	Shahida Saghir	Ms. Taqdees Gillani, MS. Nisaran Abbassi, MS. Imtiaz Nasim, MS. Sabiha Saddique Ch, Nabela Ayoub Khan,

Source: Data obtained from AJ&K legislative assembly

From 1947 to 1970, there was no representation of women in the politics of AJ&K; the political business was considered to be only men's affairs. In 1970, the adult franchise system was introduced, and minor space was created for women in the legislative assembly; gradually, the number of reserved seats increased



but not according to the ratio of the female population. Currently, the AJ&K still lags behind the fair representation of women in politics in the legislative assembly and Kashmir Council.

Findings and Discussion

Analysis of Factors Affecting Women's Political Participation in AJ&K

Structural and functional factors are substantial shapers of women's decision to join politics as a profession. They either act as enablers or obstacles to women's inclusion in politics depending on the nature of the political position a woman seeks, as well as the prevailing contextual elements such as the cultural, socio-political, and economic dynamics in the specific region of participation (Gloria, 2023). In AJ&K, women constitute a larger section of the population, 51 %, but the political interests and participation of women in politics are less due to various factors that affect their representation. The following section examines the factors that affect women's political participation, which are identified as per the responses of the political workers and members. These hindrances include a lack of political knowledge of political participation, societal norms and negative perception of women's political participation, role of financial resources, male dominance, familial politics, harassment, and domestic issues of female political workers.

Societal Norms and Negative Perception of Women's Political Participation

Women's ability to enter politics is also shaped by societal norms and gender expectations. The AJ&K is a society bound by social and cultural norms, and all the family decisions are mostly made by men. This tradition is tied with socio-cultural bindings, which confined women to stay at home and serve their families. As a consequence, women do not choose a profession that is unlike society, and among the professions, politics is one. This attitude discouraged the women to get involved in politics. Further, the negative societal perception and attitude toward the political participation of women have been considered hurdles for the under-representation of women in politics. The majority population of this region is rural, and this section is strictly bound by cultural and religious norms. They think that a woman's place is still at home rather than being active in politics or in other social activities. If women join politics as a profession, they have to struggle and compete with social-cultural norms that perceive politics as a men's profession only (Chaftez & Dworken, 1986). In our society, social norms have defined separate roles for men and women. Men's role was to be empowering and women disempowering, and this hindered women's political participation. Moreover, women are portrayed as peaceful, which minimizes their scope in politics, while men are seen as aggressive, and this is considered to be their quality and beneficial to taking part in politics. (Bouka et al., 2019). This stereotypical belief also reduced the chances of a female politician's having a successful career.

In AJ&K, with the exception of those women who belong to political families, the obtained response of political workers shows that 54% of PTI members, 34 % of PMLN, 32% from PPP, and 24% of female political workers of MC agreed that socio-cultural bindings and hurdles and negative perception for women political participation are not considered as good in our society. While 18% members of PTI workers, 16% of PMLN, 10% of PPP, and 12% of MC members do not agree with this question, these respondents say that societal pressure and negative perceptions are not barriers for women to participate in politics. This section recommended that their intrinsic motivation and aptitudes are responsible for their participation in politics. However, the response of the members who considered the social attitude as a barrier for women to participate in political activities was higher than that of those who disagreed with the question.

Role of Financial Resources

Financial resources are one of the significant factors in shaping the political career and campaign of any political worker. Women seem to be affected by getting a reputation and good positions in political careers while having insufficient financial resources. Generally, female political workers have less funds for their political activities. In the AJ&K, almost 70% of the population lives in villages and derives their livelihood from agriculture and its allied sectors. More than 1.5 million people are working abroad and sending their money to their families for their survival. The female political workers are mostly dependent, and without strong financial resources, it's difficult for AJ&K women to be part of politics. So, the ownership of financial

resources and economic empowerment strengthened the status of women. Further, in AJK, the candidate involved in politics must have strong economic resources and the strong influence of familial relationships to get any position in the party. Otherwise, female political workers are facing challenges to make their careers in politics. In AJ&K, financial resources have been the key factor that directly affects the political participation of women. Another important thing that matters in political participation is the pre- and post-election party campaigns as a way to portray the financial strength of the political leaders. With resources, women can work and run a successful campaign and pay expenditures during the electoral process. Without sufficient, it becomes difficult for women political workers to save their image. In this regard, party-wise, 60% of respondents of PTI, while 36% of PMLN, 34% of PPP, and 28% of MC agreed that weak financial resources are one of the important issues and a barrier for women to participate in politics. However, 12% of members of PTI, 14% of PMLN, 8% of PPP, and finally, 8% of respondents of MC disagreed that financial issues are a factor for women to participate in politics. The comparative analysis and response of the political workers reveal that a larger percentage of women agree that financial resources are an issue to participate in and continue politics. Similarly, during the interview, one of the respondents shared her views that it is very difficult for us to afford the protocol of party leaders and other members in party meetings, which requires us to pay high costs. Many women among us cannot manage this, and it is financially unbearable for them to appear in the political activities of the parties. We can claim that money has been a significant factor in defining the role of female politicians in AJ&K.

Lack of Political Knowledge

Political knowledge and participation are vital for democratization in every society. The knowledge and will of political participation are vital not only for democracy but also for women to successfully play their roles in social, economic, and political spheres. In the context of AJ&K, the female population is above the male, who are considerably unaware and lack knowledge about politics and their presence in the political system. Many female political workers don't know how important political participation is for women's rights. The obtained response from women political workers of different parties shows that 36% of political workers of PMLN (AJ&K) say that the women of AJ&K lack political knowledge and are also not aware of how important their presence is in the political system, while the response of PPP (AJ&K) workers was 34%, whereas workers belong to PTI (AJ&K) are 60% and MC (AJ&K) workers response was 28%. Most of the female political workers justify this question as follows: (a) the absence of local body elections and (b) lack of community training from political parties are the key reasons for the lack of political knowledge of women's political participation. Further, the less involvement and interest of educated female youth is another reason for the underrepresentation of women in politics. The respondents say that if women played an active role in civil society, media, and political institutions, then there would be a good impact on women's political participation and other socio-welfare activities.

Male Dominance and Gender Issues

The political institutions in the South Asian region have been heavily male-dominated, which has negative implications for the political participation of females. Ultimately, the gender imbalance in the political system nurtured the exclusion of women in the political sphere. In AJ&K, all the ruling parties from 1947 to the present are headed by male politicians, and policymaking powers are vested with male candidates. The representation of women in the assembly is not according to the female population proportion. The total strength of members of a legislative assembly, including men and women, is 53, out of which only five seats are reserved for women. Since 1970, many resolutions have been passed to increase the seats for women in assembly, but they have not been implemented. Even the women have open choices to contest the elections, but there are fewer chances for them to win the elections while contesting with male candidates. Some women have won the elections through direct contests, but these cases are exceptional. Male dominance, gender disparity, and biased practices have failed to encourage women in the domain of politics. The statistical response of women on this issue represents that 63% of PTI members, while 43% of PMLN, 36% of PPP, and 30% of MC respondents agree that male dominance and gender disparity have affected women's participation in the politics of AJ&K. However, 9% of members of PTI, 7% of PMLN, 6% of PPP, and 6% of MC do not agree with the question posed to them. However, they agree that the imbalanced representation of women in the political system of AJ&K is one of the hurdles that affect



women's participation in the domain of politics. The reserved seats quota for female political workers has a vital role in bringing women into politics and decision-making positions at different levels, and that must be increased.

Domestic Issues as Challenge for Women in Politics

In our society, domestic and indoor family responsibilities are mostly referred to women. As such, women don't get enough time to manage all the outdoor chores. Married women face more problems because they are obliged socially and culturally to undertake the responsibility of their kids and their family life. Sometimes, domestic issues become more serious than everything else, which disturbs their personal and family lives. In this situation, for a woman, it's not easy to focus on work properly. This situation is especially precarious for a political worker who is getting minimum benefits for her services and activities as compared to other female job holders.

The disturbances and domestic issues are one of the main hurdles that affect the political participation of women. But if women are financially strong, these challenges do not have more effects on their political careers. The obtained response shows that 62% of members of PTI, whereas 41% of PMLN, 36% of PPP, and 31% of MC, agree that domestic issues affect their political careers. Further, 10% of members of PTI and 9% of PMLN, while 6% of PPP and 5% of MC respondents do not consider it as a hurdle. In regard to the pertinent question, women shared that their political activities affect their homes and children and cause many problems for them, which ultimately affect their performance and party activities. On the other hand, due to active involvement in politics, the married life of some women political workers and assembly members has been badly damaged, and even they have been divorced. Such examples attest that domestic problems, issues, and family responsibilities are the hurdles to effective women's participation in the political domain.

Harassment and Uncomfortable Environment for Women

Women have been the victims of harassment in numerous post-conflict societies. They, too, face harassment in the political field. This fact is largely recognized on the basis of common perception, which can be considered a hurdle for women's political representation. During the political mobilization and activities, while working in a dominated environment, the women are facing many challenges, difficulties, and harassment cases. It is evident and reported from some of the most developed democratic countries that female political workers have faced serious harassment cases. Such a situation created a negative perception of the participation of women in politics, which ultimately affected their political representation. This type of situation is widely noticed in the least developed countries. Similarly, in our study areas, the women are bound to obey the cultural norms and their family bindings, and in fear of disrespect in society and harassment, most of the families do not allow their women to become active political members. In this regard, the responses of the political workers show that 52% of PTI political workers 35% of PMLN, whereas 22% of PPP and 27% of MC agree that they face harassment in this field. However, 20% of respondents of PTI political workers, 15% of PMLN, 15% of PPP, and 14% of MC members do not agree with it. However, in the off-the-record discussions, almost every woman complained about harassment. During the interviews with political workers, psychological, sexual, economic, and semiotic harassment were identified by the political workers. The respondents further stated that they should have to be extra cognizant in political meetings and processions due to the negative behavior of the public, and it is uncomfortable to be the center of attention among men. They also said that some of the members of every party harass newcomers in various ways despite the presence of few decent and encouraging men in the parties.

Non-Cooperative Behaviour of Families of Women Political Workers

Family support is very important for working women to do their jobs in an effective manner. To the women who join politics, encouragement from the family as well as societal support is very important. It is also essential for their political career. Such support also empowers women in every field. In AJ&K, women are not encouraged to participate in non-traditional professions and politics because they are considered to be male-dominated professions. Due to this perception of society, families hesitate to encourage their

female members to join politics. The response of political workers on this issue reveals that 40% of PTI political workers, 26% of PMLN, 22% of PPP, and 20% of MC agree that most women who join politics are not supported by their family members. They are instead discouraged by the families even if they develop a good reputation and are actively involved in party politics. 32% of workers of PTI, 24% of PMLN, 20% of PPP, and 16% of MC agree that they get encouragement and support from family to get involved in politics. In this regard, during the interview, the female political worker stated that in AJ&K, the women are facing a lack of supportive behavior from both family and society for their political careers. Further, she stated, "I think if the family attitude is supportive, then as hardworking political workers, we can get good respect and even enough support from our parties, and it is a good omen for young female political workers to get involved in politics of AJ&K."

Conclusion

The preceding discussion underscores the reality that since the time of the introduction of the parliamentary form of government in 1974, women have continued to be underrepresented. The above analysis shows that the female population is almost 51. Despite reforms in the political system and parties' constitutional structure, opportunities for the female population to take part in the politics of AJ&K were created, but it still lags behind in terms of representation of women. The data about the representation of women reveals that except for the reserved seats, the women could not get any place through direct contest except in one case. It reflects that the capability of women candidates was undermined while contesting with male candidates. This also unfolds in the mindset of society, which thinks that politics is the affair of men only. Male dominance and gender parity in political parties are predominant factors that also affect women's representation. Secondly, financial resources are another problem that creates hurdles for women to participate in politics. Due to the economic problems, women are facing challenges in joining politics. Because of weak financial resources, it is difficult for women to participate in and perform activities in politics. In addition, socio-cultural hurdles and negative perceptions towards women's political participation are other factors affecting women's political participation.

This paper concludes that the majority of the female population lacks political interests, and as such, their understanding of political participation and political representation is shaped by familial values, the patriarchal system, financial restraints, and numerous socio-cultural factors, as discussed above. Amongst the identified factors that affect political participation, the obtained response revealed that working political women face many domestic hurdles as well as in political life. Due to active involvement in politics, the married life of some women political workers and assembly members has been affected. Family responsibilities are one of the hurdles to women's political participation. The reported data conclude that female political worker faces harassment, which directly impacts their political participation. Moreover, family issues and responsibilities are other factors that affect women's political participation. Most of society in AJ&K believes that politics is only for men, and owing to this perception, most women hesitate to participate in politics, and those who join politics mostly do not get family support in this profession. In light of the identified factors, the political participation of women cannot be improved unless there is progressive behavior of party leaders, economic independence of women, balanced representation of male and female political workers in political parties, proper training of political workers, etc. Above all, this paper suggests that there must be a balanced representation of women in the legislative assembly of AJ&K as per the ratio of the female population. Women's political participation and involvement must be encouraged and emphasized through proper legislation of political parties and manifestos, which will greatly increase the participation of women in politics.

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