



WOMEN IN POLITICS IN ISLAMIC STATES: A CASE STUDY OF AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN

Mohammadshrif Afzal

Political Science and International Relation Department,
Istanbul Aydin University, Turkey

ABSTRACT

The equal participation of men and women in governmental process and political affairs is essential for reaching to the free and fair society. Through findings of this thesis the success of democracy is directly dependent on the equality based on gender, ethnic, creed, religion and so on. The research context of this paper goes to Islamic states and particularly analyzing the status of women in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The traditional culture, patriarchy, misinterpretation of religion founded as the main obstacles of women deprivation of politics within all Islamic states and particularly in these two Islamic democratic states, that these factors causes for the emergence of gender based violence, discrimination, rape and idea of behaving with women as the second gender. This paper goes to analyze and find out the different interpretation of Islam and democracy perspectives regarding to women social and political activities. The level of women's political participation had been raised after 2000 in both countries of my research context, reforms 2000 in Pakistan and coming of new democratic regime along with international support in Afghanistan caused for women to be more empowered and active in politics and persuaded women to get apart in political and social affairs of these two societies. Analyzing of historical circumstances of women in both countries, helped this research to be more serious in finding the actual position of women in two traditional societies, that are mostly influenced of patriarchal culture in case of women.

The share of women in politics had been raised, but only in numbers, while still women who are direct or indirect involved in political affairs or legislative organs experiencing a symbolic role with no authority of decision making. My findings in this paper show that the women are still used as a tool for having more power in government and more seats in legislative body of government in Pakistan, and for getting more support of international community by government in Afghanistan. Despite the paper based legal context of these two states motivated the women to be more active in politics, but there have never been a fully protected atmosphere for women to compete will male counterparts. The main reasons again go to deep roots of traditional culture and misconception of religion along with sub factors. The recommendations of this paper in order to empower and promote women as equal political partners are to combat for annihilation of traditional culture and establishing the moderate connection of religion along with democratic aspects.

Keywords - Afghanistan, Democracy, Equal Participation, Islamic States, Pakistan, Women

I. INTRODUCTION

Political participation might be launched by various ways as participation in the national and local election, participation in the presidential election as voter or candidate, involvement in political activities, participation in political meetings, having political parties' or organizations membership, getting membership in through election in national and local assemblies. The most justified form of participation in politics for women is considered as the voters and membership in assemblies, that has been associated with some specific quota for women in assemblies around the globe. The lowest level of political participation is having subgrade right and highest level is being elected as head of the state. (Dahl, 1991)

In this regard, democracy without the equal participation of people might be replaced by dictatorship. The women's political involvement is directly connected with the type of regime and structure of government, as we are witness of two muslim women who have held the highest level political participaion in representative democracies as prime ministers in Pakistan in 1987 and the current prime minister of Bangladesh. (Norris & Inglehart, 2002)

Without laws, measures, and practices that lead for equality the democratic ideals of accountability, inclusiveness and transparency cannot be achieved. It shows that equality based on gender, ethnic, religion, creed and etc... is the main principle of the democratic regime. That we must weave these ideals into the political, social and economic sector of a society, hence that women reach their equality and potential with men (Ibrahimi, 2016).

The women participation in politics as the most vulnerable group of society is treated as the central element of democracy, which quality of democracy depends on the nature and degree of women's participation. Meanwhile the laws and initiatives, political system and barriers are the three general factors that influence the level of women's involvements in local government. In this research context of two Islamic countries, I have found out that legally and according to the local law of every state, there are no any limitation and prohibition for women to participate in government thus the two other factors are acting as the obstacles in this field (Awan, 2016).

This paper has focused on the level of women participation in politics within the Islamic states and particularly in Afghanistan and Pakistan, so it needs the role of religion on this issue to be mentioned. Obviously, the religion has deep roots in peoples believes and thoughts, which influence the socio-economic and political direction of societies (Gosha, 2003). It has been treated the most important feature of gender inequality as the status of women in religious communities is subjected to the outcome of religious texts interpretations. The level of religion effects differs according to time and space as well as due to the historical and cultural roots of religion.

Researches on impacts of religion over people's bahavior show that the status of women and the state of gender inequality is significantly influenced by religion since it tries to mobilize women socially and politically in a certain way within a society. In Islamic states the interpretaion of religious texts caused for emergence of some cultural norms which are restricting women in social and political affairs of society and leads for some sort of patriarchal structure in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

II. OBJECTIVE

- 1- To understand the role of religion in women's political participation
- 2- To analyze the status of women in Islamic states

3 – To compare the women’s political share in Afghanistan and Pakistan

4- To understand the factors that empower and restrict women to join in Politics of Afghanistan and Pakistan.

III. WOMEN IN POLITICS OF ISLAMIC STATES

Religion as an influential factor in women’s rights and obligation in all around the world is essential to be concentrated. And it is as one of the socio-culture factors influencing women’s social and political rights. Not only in Muslim societies but globally men are dominating in politics in number and authority, while currently those women who are involved in politics of Islamic states failed to bring changes in lives of all women. According to the inter-parliamentary latest report of 2018 women are holding only 24% of Parliaments’ seats. Last few decades have been witnessed the women feminist groups and organizations have become more aware of decision-making process importance, in order to improve the social condition of women, and the substance of political participation. This is why political participation has been changed and taken different forms in every country, not only because of internally changes of the political system, but it is due to the international situation that these organizations and groups contributed to changes.

The role of religion is obviously varied across the globe regarding time and space, meanwhile, the status of women is directly dependent on the interpretation of religious texts and communities’ religious setups. The share of women in the most religious communities is less because of the presence of the huge number of religious peoples that religious people tends to patriarchy and patriarchal structure of society restrict women.

According to a research done by (Klingorova & Havlicek) on the impacts of religion on gender equality, found out that in the states without religious practices (Secular States), the gender equality index is higher than religious states. Based on this research Buddhism states ranked second, Christianity third and Islamic states ranked fourth of gender equality due to the low level of women involved in the labor force and less of literacy rate among women. While relating to political activities of women, as in Muslim states the women quota has been increased and entered widely put them in the second position along with Buddhism and Christianity states. (2015)

The women's social right and political participation in Islamic states are perceived as the conflictual issues that Islamic fundamentalism and misinterpretation are known as the biggest reasons for contradictory views regarding the women's status. Some scientists have been proposed two main approaches for considering women in Islamic states in relation to the political range. First, the state itself plays a vital role in prescribing and shaping women's role in politics, social activities, and culturally through its politics and laws. The second approach is considering women as political actors, examining how women participate in the political environment. And do formal politics such as office holding, voting, involving in movements and collective actions in nationalist, Islamist, feminist or civil society organizations or we can say any activity which can be treated politically. These two approaches are more correlated with each other, of course, it seems that the marginalization of women in politics states the systems that are in operation to women's contrary (Offenhauer, 2005:87).

According to religion interpretation by scholars in Islamic states that the political system is merge of Islam doctrine along with democratic aspects there are no any limitation for women to have suffrage right or being member of assemblies. But for being head of state there is no any consensus among scholars and every one has different interpretation which has caused for restricting of women to be head of state and this is why still in muslim countries we are witness of less number of women in highest level of decision making positions. (Ansari, 2008)

Huntington clarifies the reason behind this perception as the existence of clash between democracy and Islam doctrine in Islamic democratic states that covers Afghanistan and Pakistan as well as. According to him there had never been an example of fully functioning democratic and Islamic state; while the elements of Islamic doctrine act as a barrier to democracy. And Huntington points out that a state can not be democratic and Islamic at the same time. (Larson, 2011)

Actually, a misconception and perception of Islamic and democracy thoughts justified in Afghanistan and Pakistan as other obstacles in case of women empowerment. The level of women participation in Islamic state is directly connected with the regime dependency to religion, as the Arab regimes are more dependent to religion according to IPU 2018 ranking women's share in parliaments of these states is located at the bottom

of the index with 17.8%, meanwhile in another side the women are involving in parliament of Afghanistan with 27.4% and in Pakistan with 20.25%. (IPU, 2018)

IV. WOMEN'S SHARE IN POLITICS OF AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN AND FACTORS AFFECTING THE LEVEL OF THEIR PARTICIPATION

Afghanistan and Pakistan as the two Islamic states in South Asia, obtain the most similar communities. There are many similarities between the inhabitants of these two states; as ethnic, religion, culture, and a common language within some areas of these two states. Religion plays a central role in Afghanistan and Pakistan, that causes to emerged some extremism and terrorism to has influence over democratic setups. (Bano, 2017:2)

While in Afghanistan these groups had been extracted from the control of government and Pakistan could have control over these groups. The extremism extracted of religion interpretation impacted all the political and social status, that women are treated as the first victims of extremism. As I pointed in introduction that the regime type and political system of any state directly effect women's political participation, and in democratic type of regime the equal participation of gender is known as a precondition; so in this regards the status of women in both countries can be classified into two different period of time before 2000 and after.

Historically Pakistan is treated younger country with almost 70 years of age than Afghanistan Through this research, I have found that women could have some visible role in Pakistan historical movements and governmental process, while in Afghanistan this measure is reverse. So I have traced a comparison analysis of women political status in these two states from their establishment as the independent states. This measure had been continued until 2001, but in 2001 the result of this research seems to be varied. while the women's status from the 20th midcentury till 2001 in Afghanistan was deteriorating day by day that caused the women to be more under discrimination and become vulnerable. (Jafari, 2016:27)

Democracy had never been experienced in Afghanistan till 2001, while a partial elected government with an elected parliament had been experienced in Mohammad Zahir's era, in other side Pakistan from the beginning of its establishment have been experiencing democracy except of two times that the ruling had been changed due to military coups,

that then these military governments as well tried to execute the democratic principles. And the democratic aspects caused for some obvious movements of women in Pakistan.

1. Historical Engagement of women in politics of both countries

Historically the women's political status had been having raised and fallen in both countries. In Afghanistan, its first stage of raising started from 1919 and ends in 1927, and the second stage of raising up started cautiously from the 1940s and 1950s and continued till 1990, till a time which totally the women were deprived of their fundamental rights of education, access to health and every thing. During the first raising stage, women faced many reforms and modernizing activities as the result of King Amanullah's endeavors, as the adaptation of equality of gender in education, health, and social activities. The campaign against veil was started by king, girls entered to schools, 10 women entered to the Senate, many organizations opened for women and many graduated girls were sent to Turkey for higher education. These reforms and endeavors paved the way for the emergence of a revolution by religious and traditional rebel groups against regime till collapse of the regime in 1927. (Ibrahimi, 2016)

The second stage of raising started in 1940s and 1950s, but without any pace, during the second raising period many distinguished regimes ruled over the country till 1992, despite some short-term reforms were implemented but in comparison to the first stage of raising up these reforms didn't seem significant. A female ambassador was appointed to UN in 1958, the veil announced voluntary for women while the women were expected to leave the veil, some endeavors resulted for putting gender equality in constitution, the right of suffrage and to enter to elected politics were given to women, a women minister was elected by parliament in 1964. (Ghosh, 2003:6)

The pace and cautious reforms continued till the Mujahidin victory in 1992 (a group formed of religious rebel group). At the period of 1992- 2001 the women experienced the black days of their life during the periods of civil war and Taliban regime. Not only they had not permission of entering in politics, but also they were deprived of their initial right of literacy and along with these restrictions some orders ruled by Taliban which restrict women even to go out of homebound. Historically excluded that any reforms with pace regarding women, in spite of inefficiency caused for some insurgency that put Afghanistan for a long-term war and conflict. The 4 decades of Afghanistan war is not only connected to women issue, but it is known as a factor of this long-term war.

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In other side, the brilliant historical period Pakistan in case of women activeness in politics goes to 1988 and 1993 that a woman was ruling the democratic state of Pakistan as prime minister. While in this period of time that the state was ruled by Benazir Bhutto the women's quota in legislative and decision making positions came to the lowest average of its history. At the beginning of Pakistan establishment, many Pakistani women attended in struggles for the establishment of Pakistan and Fatima Ali Jinnah the Quaid's sister attended in 1965 as a candidate and the two other women Begum Jahan Ara Shahnawaz and Begum Shaista Ikram Ullah attempted to empower women legally and constitutionally. Women had suffrage rights and the assembly seats were allocated for women at the beginning 3% and rose up to 10% in 1985 but again it fell down in 1990 to less than 1%. (Dutoya, 2013)

Historically Pakistani women engagement in politics in number was higher than Afghanistan. In spite of the quantitative increase of women's, the situation of women empowerment seemed not to be better which had not affected the lives of women qualitatively, while in Afghanistan there was no remarkable qualitative nor quantitative improvements for women except short periods. the reason behind this conclusion might be referred to the level of democratization that Pakistan experienced from its establishment time.

2..Changes in women's political status after 2000

The democratic regime by the cooperation of the international community came to power in Afghanistan after the annihilation of Taliban in 2001. The concept of a democratic regime in this country was depended to gender equality, so for this purpose along with specifying the women's role and quota in papers and laws the Afghanistan government along with international community supports started some practical actions. That caused unprecedented developments and improvements of women in politics. In spite of democratic regime ruling in Pakistan since its establishment as an independent state, in this territory, the last 18 years are also treated as a brilliant period for women in politics. The share of women had been increased by military government and women motivated as more to be active in politics and get part in countries political affairs. (Awan, 2016)

The achievements for women in both countries are directly connected with their commitments to international communities and international treaties such as (CEDAW),

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(ICCR), (UDHR) while considering of gender equality in Afghanistan was totally mentioned as a precondition of international donation and aids. In order to be close to the international average of gender equality both governments started for the execution of some sort of practical reforms. According to UNDP survey in 2017 Afghanistan is ranked in 153 while Pakistan ranked in 133 of global gender equality ranking. This differs among two states is much visible in literacy rate of secondary education of female and labor force. Hence after 17 years of reforms in Pakistan, 27% of eligible girls were holding secondary education and female formed 24.9% of the labor force in Pakistan.

Meanwhile, these average in Afghanistan seems to be still in the lowest average with 11.4 enrollment of female in secondary school and 19.5% of labor force around the country (UNDP, 2017). In spite of these huge differ, the women's share in politics and legislative body of the states is reverse in both states, more women entered to legislative body and politics of Afghanistan than Pakistan, that we came to a result that the situation of women political improvements have put Afghanistan in a superior position than Pakistan. There is a need that the improvement in both countries should be analyzed and compare the factors that have been restricting women in both countries and know which factor is the most influential in both. These analyzations will come in next topics.

3..The two countries' Women legal context

The constitutions of both countries as the mother law of the state that define the inhabitants' duties and responsibilities had been adopted based on Islamic theories and democratic principles. The equality of gender in all aspect of life is declared in the constitution of both countries, while in some cases women and children as the vulnerable groups of society deserve some special support and provision for protection. Both states are committed to the universal declaration of human rights and passed the sub-laws based on equality, but the problem raised for women in these two states has never been legal, hence it is dependent to practice and implementation of laws and regulation. Legally Women should be granted equal rights of social and political activities within their society, and the government should attempt for the annihilation of discrimination and violence against women.

The Afghanistan's new passed constitution of 2004 and the Pakistan modified constitution of 2012 treated the women as vulnerable group of society and ordered for some special sort of supports. Along with this there have been some quota granted for women in legislation organ of government. Two states with different governmental structure are holding parliament and assembly, Pakistan with a mix system of presidency along with parliamentary is holding national and provincial assemblies that the women's share is declared in its constitution as 60 reserved seats in national assembly and in other side Afghanistan is holding a presidency structure of government and in this country the constitution has appointed a quota of at least two female representative from each province in lower house of parliament and half of the appointed representatives by president in upper house should be female as well, along with this legally the women's share in provincial councils, district councils and all level of politics is clarified by sub laws in accordance to constitution orders of both states. (Afghanistan constitution, 2004) & (Pakistan constitution, 2012).

4.. Women's participation level in Politics of Both States

The women share in political affairs of Afghanistan with a centralized governmental structure, had been improving brilliantly till 2006 that was satisfactory, 30% of women share in public services positions for women who had never imagined to be involved in the governmental process at this measure. But the situation didn't stay consistent while it decreased to 21.9% in 2015. An Afghan was appointed as the vice president, many ministers and deputy ministers were evidence of improvements. The 2017 reports show that share of women in national unity government is 3 ministries, 4 ambassadors, 9 deputy ministers, 12 women in peace council, one district leader, and many other women in lowest positions (AWN, 2017:1,3). While lastly there have been added two more female ambassadors and 3 other female deputy ministers as well.

In other side, Pakistan is running by a parliamentary system of government that the role of political parties for empowerment and improvement of women is much more visible. And the improvement in the share of women in the governmental process and political activities started from 2000 that the time regime started for some reforms that caused for increasing of women's involvements in Pakistan. According to my research, I could find from the structures of political parties in Pakistan that has never been in a position of women empowerment. The women's share in political parties seems very low and

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women are used as a tool by parties to have more seats in national and local assemblies. Currently, the role of two women is visible in political parties of Pakistan one as leader of ANP party and the other as member MQM, while both are not able to change the situation of men domination in their parties due to some factors.

Pakistan as a federal government is currently holding 3 women ministers out of 24 ministers (www.na.gov.pk, 2018) while at the provincial government as Pakistan is divided into four provinces the number of women in provincial ministries goes to 4 provincial ministers out of 75 ministries. Along with this none of the provincial government is running by women, that shows a disappointing average of women in decision making positions of Pakistan.

The current share of women in parliament and assemblies is based on the 2004 constitution of Afghanistan and 2012 modified constitution of Pakistan. Constitutionally the number of women representative in Afghanistan lower house of parliament should be at least two women from each province and according to Pakistan constitution, 60 seats are reserved for women out of 342. In case of women involvement in legislative body, Afghanistan ranked 55th position and Pakistan is located in 93rd of IPU ranking. Pakistani women share currently in assemblies after the election of 2018 goes to 20.6 in lower house (Assembly) and 19.2% in upper house (Senate) while the Afghan women share in parliament is 27.7% in lower house (house of representatives) and 26.5% in upper house (Senate) (IPU, 2018), and also the share of women in provincial assemblies of Pakistan is adopted 17.5% and in provincial councils of Afghanistan it is 20%.

Currently despite all the insecurity and obstacles the level of women involvement in Afghanistan's politics seems a bit satisfactory than Pakistan, while historically it was vice versa.

5..Both countries' common and non-common restricting factors for women

The level of women's participation in politics as expressed before is depended to some factors, there are some factors which influence women's political involvement generally and treated as shared challenge in front of both countries women that the level of their influency differs by areas. In other side there might be some factors which are not common and impacted only the women of a specific area.

Religion, traditional culture, violence, non-protective workplace, rape, literacy rate, economic dependency of women to men, patriarchal system of society and security are factors that specified in my research that restricted women to be active politically. While among these factors by comparing two states I argue that some have a weak impact while the impacts of some others are more justified. The patriarchal structure of societies and traditional culture are the mother factors of restricting women from any type of social and political activities. As I found out in both countries most of the people connect their patriarchal and cultural norms perspectives to religion in order to put religion as the influential factors of limiting women. The religion has been interpreted by peoples' interests in both countries, particularly the tribal groups legitimize their men domination and patriarchal actions by misinterpreting of religion for their own objectives, and traditional cultural norms and patriarchal structure are emerged as the result of these types of interpretation of religion in both countries.

The patriarchal structure of societies and traditional culture provide the ground for the emergence of many more barriers in front of women, as war, violence, rape, low rate of literacy and economic weakness for women. Historically I found that traditional culture worked as one of the most influential factors of emerging many long-term wars in Afghanistan. The current insecurity and consistent war of Afghanistan also have roots in the perspectives of traditional cultural norms. While insecurity in Afghanistan is known as the most influential barrier, but when I assess in Pakistan that has never experienced a consistent comprehensive war and insecurity, it seemed that this is not only the barrier. Again the culture, patriarchy, and insecurity are interconnected factors while the level of traditional culture domination differs regarding the security of the place, where there is no any security the traditional culture is much more dominated. The developments in case of women have been experienced in urbans than rurals in both countries.

In Pakistan, women have much more social freedom in urban areas and less political activities, but in Afghanistan urban areas women are more active politically and have less social freedom than Pakistan; that this might be as the result of security as well as the level of cultural norms. There is a form of councils dominated in rural areas of both as the names of Jirga and Shura, which most of the local decisions are taken by these

councils, none of the members of these councils are women and have never believed in women's rights. (Liebsch. 2011:9)

The level of patriarchal practices has put women in an inferior position than men, the average of violence, rape, and discrimination against women in Afghanistan is much higher than Pakistan. Women are less economic autonomous and literate in Afghanistan than Pakistan, 27% of women have secondary school education and 24.9% are involved in the labor force in Pakistan, while these average in Afghanistan goes to 11.4% and 19.5% the average of literacy has been calculated on older than 25 years of age. (UNDP. 2017)

So finally despite all the common barriers and it's more impacts on Afghan women regarding the comparison between these two states, the average of women involved in politics in Afghanistan is higher than Pakistan. The reason might be referred that the role of cultural norms in Pakistan is more justified in case of women's public position jobs and politics and also another reason might be referred to the Pakistani women themselves that are not struggling for their rights and empowerments. But in Afghanistan, there has been more focused on the annihilation of cultural norms in urbans while in rural areas women are still experiencing cultural obstacles. Another reason might be referred to the international community pressure on the Afghan government to put more women in decision making positions and political affairs. Along with this, there is a huge fund expended in case of empowering Afghan women by the international donors and many organizations are still trying to put more funds for promotion of women in.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Globally the political system, governmental structure, socioeconomic, socio-culture, religion, and level of democratization are the factors that affect the level of women involvements in politics. Religion is the most influential factor for the shaping of people's thoughts and framework of political participation opportunities for women and men. Somehow as the interpretation of religion acts as a barrier so according to my findings, the states that are more secular the gender equality and women's political participation are more visible than religious states. In Islamic states particularly in Afghanistan and Pakistan the impact of Islam seemed to be more influential in shaping of women's social and political status. There are some interpretations of Islam that has

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shaped their culture and norms of society that acting as the biggest obstacle in front of women to be politically and socially active. While mostly the culture dominated as the result of a misconception of Islam in Islamic societies even deprives women of their fundamental rights little on to political rights.

Women have been experiencing some brilliant improvements in both countries since the 21st century, while the level of participation and equality of gender historically were seemed to be at its worse state. The improvements of women in the last 18 years are dependent on donors' pressure, international treaties, and coming of democratic state in Afghanistan. And in Pakistan along with international treaties, the reforms have done after 2000 played an influential role.

After 18 years of democracy domination in Afghanistan, and accomplishments of reforms in Pakistan, the situation of Afghan women politicians are much better than Pakistani women. The women improvements in both countries might be treated as achievements for women quantitatively, while qualitatively the numerical presence of women in politics could not bring significant changes in the life of women generally. For Afghan women, the last 18 years' achievements seemed to be brilliant as they reached to unprecedented shares in politics that had never been at the same situation before as the result of long-term wars and conflicts that directed for numerous types of violence, rape and restriction for Afghan women. In other side it was expected that the situation for women in politics of Pakistan should be much better and locate in high ranking as they had never experienced a long-term war nor conflict.

Traditional culture domination in both countries has caused the emergence of a high-level patriarchy that the level of patriarchy is distinguished by rural and urban areas of the country. Economic dependency of women to the male of the family and society, low rate of literacy emerged as the result of patriarchy and socio-cultural factors among women in both countries refer to a huge barrier for women to be prepared for a road map of reaching in politics.

Despite specifying some quota in assemblies of both countries for women and appointing women in senior positions, still women do not have the acting authority and they are used as tool for legitimizing the regimes. For having and ideal Islamic democratic state of equal participation of gender in politics, there are need for compaigning for annihilation of traditional culture, establishing moderate Islam within

the societies and and fundametalizing the bottom up leadership model instead of top-down might be beneficial.

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