

Women's Political Participation in Mardan District of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in 2013 General Elections of Pakistan

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Women's political participation is sine qua non of women's empowerment movement. Pakistan is a developing democracy where citizens are given equal political rights without any gender discrimination. The Provincial Assembly of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa elected a female as Deputy Speaker for the first time. Report of various organizations on 2013 general elections declared that women's participation in politics have strengthened its roots in Pakistan. Mardan is the 19th largest city of Pakistan and 2nd most populous district of KP Province. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is the most affected province of Pakistan in the war against global terrorism nevertheless in the 2013 general elections, the province generally and district Mardan especially witnessed increase in women's political participation. An encouraging number of women casted their votes, contested election, and launched elections campaigns. The research is qualitative and is based on primary and secondary sources. The study explores the changing trends of women's politics in Mardan.

Keywords: women, empowerment, democracy, elections, Mardan, KP, Pakistan,

In democratic societies all citizens have equal rights. No society can develop properly where half of its citizens are either ignored. Women constitute half of the world population and contribute immensely to the development of human societies. A democratic state demands citizen's participation in state affairs irrespective of class, creed, color, and sex. A conspicuous feature of a democratic framework is the principles of human rights, including the political rights of both men and women. Any developmental project, either political, social, or economic etc. that does not reflect the perspectives, opinions, views, and experiences of all those who will be affected, is not reliable one (IDEA, 2005). The paper explores the empowerment of women in historical perspective in district Mardan, KP, Pakistan. The data for the paper was collected from primary and secondary sources. For the purpose female political figures were interviewed.

Women in Pakistan's Political History

Pakistan is one among the first fifty countries of the world who has established a permanent and independent National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) (Pakistan, 2003). Since its creation, the history of women's political participation is as rich as the political history of the state itself. British ruled over Indo-Pak Sub-Continent up to 1947. In Europe, women were given right of suffrage in early 20th century but they did not extend it to Sub-Continent and only the policy of reserved seats was implemented (Kamal: 2012). Pakistani women were bestowed upon the right of suffrage through the Indian Independence Act of 1947. Before the partition of Sub-Continent, it was observed among the Muslim women of Punjab who not only voted for the All India Muslim League but also organized large scale political gatherings. Under the Constitution of 1956, Pakistani women were given the right to vote in national elections which re-affirmed their contribution in state affairs. Similarly, they were also given 10 reserved seats, out of total 156 seats, in national legislature (John,

2007). From 1956 to 1973 in Pakistan, the Constitution making struggle witnessed extra seats for women, by means of selection, have been existing in national and provincial legislature accordingly (PCST, 2014). In the political history of Pakistan, the decade of 1980s is a well-known decade for the Pakistani women. A powerful women's movement made a dramatic impact on political scene of Pakistan which shaped the women future prospects in the country. Under the de facto military regime, political parties were unable to inject any life in the movement for restoration of democracy in Pakistan. In the 20th century, Pakistani women's political participation remained shocking one due to the socio-economic factors (Marian, 2000). However, the shocking trend of women's politics has been changing with the beginning of 21st century.

With the introduction of Legal Framework Order 2002 (LFO implemented on August 21, 2002), General Pervaiz Musharraf fixed 33% percentage reserved seats for women and 17% in Local Government Election and state legislatures respectively (NCSW, 2010). In the political history of Pakistan, women were given representation in the Upper House of Federal legislature for the first time. These dynamics have encouraged Pakistani women enormously. Therefore, in the political structure of Pakistan women's political participation is increasing at every level i.e. local, provincial and national.

Currently, Pakistan has 38.8 million registered male voters as compared to 32.2 million registered female voters. In the world, women make about 51 percent of the total population which is the same in Pakistan as well but in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, it is about 48 percent of the total population (Rana, Express Tribune, 2011). According to the statistical data, male population in Pakistan stands 92.02 million and female stands as 87.14 million (Express Tribune, 2011). Mardan is the second populous district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Mardan, 2016). The political culture of District Mardan, as per women's political participation, is as rich as any other district in Pakistan. It is also a fact that majority of women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Mardan are uneducated, socio and economically dependent and, therefore, their political participation was not very remarkable. Some critics are of the opinion that Pakhtun's women participation in politics and especially in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), is the breach of Pakhtun's social taboos (Chattan, 2013). However, these political developments can be traced back to the Pakistan's movement of 20th century where Begum Zari Sarfaraz (1923-2008) had remained an active political worker and leader of the Muslim League and had also been elected as member of the West Pakistan Assembly in 1962. In 1977, Begum Naseem Wali Khan was the first woman who contested election as a candidate of Pakistan National Alliance from NA-10, Mardan (Sabir, n. d.). The credit of the first elected woman as MNA and MPA goes to Begum Naseem Wali Khan as a result of the general elections of 1977 and 1988, 1990, 1993, and 1997 respectively (Khan, 2016). In 1985, Zarnoosha Bibi also contested election from the same constituency.

In the general elections of 2013, women almost equally with men participated in the elections. Urban and rural areas were equally covered for election campaigns and women participation in rural areas was comparatively better as compared to the last few elections. For the first time, it was observed that women came out for canvassing and supporting their party's candidates. In the general elections of 2013, males were under threats in Swabi, Mardan, Charsadda and Peshawar as Taliban had threatened them for their political campaigns. Women only led their political campaigns (Gohar, 2016). Secondly, they came to polling stations for casting their votes in spite of the fact that Mardan was already declared a red zone area for election through security measures. Lastly, most women contested independently in elections on general seats. For example, from NA-44 Tribal Area-IX (Bajaur Agency) Badam Zari contested the elections as an independent

candidate. She is the first ever female political candidate from FATA. The significance of this episodic event lies in the fact that she has not only broken the social taboos of Pakhtun traditional society but has also bravely faced the militancy and uncertainty in the region. All these developments have challenged the existing traditional moorings in the political culture of Pakhtun society.

While commenting on the Badam Zari's efforts of contesting general elections 2013, Farhat Khan (Ex-MNA of PPP on reserved seat 2008-2013) says that:

"I appreciate the efforts of Badam Zari. I want to give her medal. She did a lot in the political history of tribal (area); the most traditional and conservative part of Pakistan. After 9/11, this region has suffered a lot due to war on terror and its repercussions. Zari would have faced a lot of problems while deciding to contest elections on general seat. But her decision to contest election on general seat is a green signal to the women of Pakistan in general and FATA in particular" (Farhat, 2016).

A unique development of the 2013 general elections has been explored by the Aurat Foundation (AF) that almost 0.2 million women were engaged in elections duties as Presiding Officers, Assistant Presiding Officers, Polling Officers, Security personnel or have been appointed as members of 400 monitoring teams formed by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) (Ishaq, 2013). This mechanism has indoctrinated a sense of socio-political awareness among the rest of female strata of the society as in such a higher number women were not appointed in previous elections. However, AF also feared about the right to vote of these women that they would have not used their right to vote because of their legal responsibilities (Ishaq, 2013).

Women – As Voters

Under the Article 25 of the 1973 Constitution of Pakistan, all citizens shall equal rights without any discrimination between men and women (Constitution of Pakistan, 1973). Therefore, every woman can cast her vote as a citizen of Pakistan, at least 18 years old, having Computerized National Identity Card, sound minded, and listed as a voter in the Electoral List (IFES, 2013).

For the 2013 general elections, 37.6 million women were registered to vote nation-wide as compared to 48.6 million men. It stood with a percentage of 43.6% as female-voters and 56.4% as male voters. The percentage of female-voters registration in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was 42.9% (ECP, 2013). As far as district Mardan is concerned, total registered voters were 987122 among which 5773325 were male-voters and 409797 were female-voters (ECP, 2016). The ECP declared that 86 million voters cast their votes which stands 55% turnout as compared to 44% of 2008 general elections. ECP also declared female turnout as 40% of the total turnout in 2013, which was reportedly higher than the past general elections in Pakistan (ECP, 2013).

As a result of the 2008 general elections, there were 564 female polling stations across the country in which no woman had voted. Out of these polling stations, 478 polling stations were in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (84.8%), 31 in Punjab (5.5), 11 in Sindh (02%), 20 were in Baluchistan (3.5), 23 were in FATA (4.1), and 01 was in Islamabad (0.2%), where no woman had cast her vote (GEMMP, 2013).

Women - As Candidates

In the general elections of 2013, an encouraging number of women contested elections for the National as well as Provincial Assemblies of Pakistan. The ECP declared in its electoral summary data that total 4671 candidates will contest elections on 272 National Assembly (NA) seats (ECP, 2013). Out of 4671 candidates, 161 (3.14%) women candidates contested elections from 112

different constituencies. Only 61 women candidates were issued party tickets and the remaining contested elections independently. In the general elections of 2008, 75 women candidates contested elections from 62 different constituencies for the NA of Pakistan (Dawn, May 4, 2013). So, there is a significant increase of 129.8% of women who contested elections in 2013 as compared to 2008 (Dawn, April 21, 2013). But the policy of political parties in issuing party tickets to women is not an encouraging one. As far as issuing party tickets to female candidates are concerned highest percentage was observed in Punjab as 4.6%, Sindh 3.2%, Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) 2.7%, KP 2.4%, Baluchistan 1.1%, and FATA as 0.2% (FAFEN, 2013). For the NA of Pakistan, 14 women contested elections from 12 different constituencies of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The details are given in the table No.01, below (ECP, 2013):

Table 1

Names of Women Contesting the General Elections for the 14th NA.

S.No	Name of Female Candidate for National Assembly	Constituency	Votes secured
01	i. Ms. Tabana (1/17)*	NA-3, Peshawar-III.	535
	ii. Fiza Tariq (2/17)	Do	679
02	Aneela Shaheen (1/13)	NA-4, Peshawar-IV.	1852
03	Shazia Aurangzeb Khan (1/12)	NA-9, Mardan-I.	7002
04	Nazia Zulfiqar (1/16)	NA-14, Kohat.	254
05	Rabia Gul (1/13)	NA-18, Abbottabad-II.	2954
06	i. Faiza Bibi Rasheed (1/11)	NA-19, Haripur.	2488
	ii. Irum Fatima (2/11)		3675
07	Lady Doctor Shaheen Zameer (1/9)	NA-21, Mansehra-cum-Tor Ghar.	814
08	Musarat Shaheen (1/33)	NA-24, D.I.Khan.	99
09	Qabool Bibi (1/20)	NA-27, Lakki Marwat.	120
10	Asma Mehmud (1/11)	NA-32, Chitral.	597
11	Mst. Nusrat Begum (1/15)	NA-34, Lower Dir.	187
12	Badam Zari (1/26)	NA-44, Tribal Area-IX.	142

**it shows the number of contesting candidates in the constituency. The nominator indicates female contesters(s) and denominator indicates the total number of contesters (male and female) in the constituency.*

Badam Zari is the first-ever candidate from FATA who contested election independently from NA 44, Bajaur Agency in 2013, after gaining permission of her husband and relatives.⁶⁸ Bajaur Agency is located in the north-west region of FATA, Pakistan, where Taliban were highly influential since 9/11 (ECP, 2016). *Nusrat Begum* contested elections from Lower Dir, which one among the most conservative districts of Pakistan and where religious extremists groups are dominant. *Gulana Bibi* of deeply patriarchal region (an illiterate elder woman of Tank, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa), ran for office but latter on withdrew her nomination paper due to Taliban threats (Gosh, 2013).

The four Provincial Assemblies (PAs) of Pakistan has 577 elected seats. For the 577 elected seats, 300 women candidates contested elections from 210 different provincial constituencies in the general elections of 2013 (ECP,2013). If we compare it with the general elections of 2008 so there were 126 women candidates from 112 different constituencies (ECP, 2008). Again, it is a significant increase in women politics. Among these 300 women candidates, 171 women contested from 118 different constituencies of Punjab, 88 women contested from 59 different constituencies of Sindh, 29

women contested from 24 different constituencies of KP, and 12 women contested from 09 different constituencies of Baluchistan (ECP, 2008).

In the 2013 general elections, the electoral participation and representation of Mardan's women have also been reflected as rich and colorful scenes as any other district of Pakistan. Mardan's women participated well in the general elections as voters, candidates, and elections campaigners. Women as voters used the right to vote in a better way than the last few general elections. District Mardan has 03 NA seats, and 08 PA seats. An ever- high number of women contested elections on these general seats. For the National Assembly of Pakistan, from NA-9, Mardan-I, Shahzia Aurangzeb contested election on PPPP ticket. For the Provincial Assembly, Riffat Begum from PK-23, Mardan-I, Nusrat Ara from PK-24, Mardan-II, Mumlikat Bashir from PK-27, Mardan-V, and Lal Baha from PK-30, Mardan-VIII, contested the general elections of 2013, independently. Similarly, Badam Zari contested election for National Assembly from NA-44, Tribal areas-IX, independently. She belongs to district Mardan by birth. Mst. Nusrat begum contested elections from NA-34, Lower Dir, independently. Bajaur Agency and District Lower Dir are the two most conservative and traditionalist areas of Pakistan (Bushra, 2016). Although, none of these candidates came out victorious but their participation in elections on general seats set a benchmark in electoral history of Mardan as well as Pakistan. For the Provincial Assembly of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 29 women contested elections from 24 different constituencies. The details are given in the Table No.02, below (ECP, 2013):

Table 2*Names of Women Contesting Elections on General Seats for the KP Assembly*

S.No	Name of Female Candidate for Provincial Assembly of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (PK)	Constituency	Votes secured
01	Khalid Tanveer Rohaila Advocate (1/23)*	PK-2, Peshawar-II.	11
02	Yasmin Sherazi (1/26)	PK-3, Peshawar-III.	397
03	Khalida Nasreen (1/18)	PK-4, Peshawar-IV.	08
04	Robina Shaheen (1/25)	PK-5, Peshawar-V.	19
05	i. Dilshad Begum (1/12)	PK-12, Nowshera-I.	19
	ii. Ameen Bibi (1/12)		96
06	Dilbara (1/13)	PK-15, Nowshera-IV.	178
07	Samina Naz (1/16)	PK-17, Charsadda-I.	107
08	Rifaqat Begum (1/16)	PK-23, Mardan-I.	35
09	Nusrat Ara (1/18)	PK-24, Mardan-II.	52
10	Mumlikat Bashir (1/22)	PK-27, Mardan-V.	97
11	Lal Baha (1/21)	PK-30, Mardan-VIII.	98
12	Shaghuftha Begum (1/12)	PK-39, Kohat-III.	99
13	Farah Khan (1/25)	PK-41, Karak-II.	94
14	Naeema Shaheen Nisar (1/20)	PK-44, Abbottabad-I.	1042
15	Noreen Kazmi (1/11)	PK45, Abbottabad-II.	107
16	i. Faiza Bibi Rasheed (1/16)	PK-50, Haripur-II.	538
	ii. Syeda Bakhtawar Shah (1/16)	Do	222
17	Nageen Khan (1/13)	PK-52, Haripur-IV.	73

18	i. Mst. Sajida Tabassum (1/18)	PK-53, Mansehra-I.	304
	ii. Mst. Syeda Gulnaz Shah (1/18)	Do	57
19	Arshida Bibi (1/10)	PK-56, Mansehra-IV.	866
20	i. Uzma Semab (1/34)	PK-64, D.I.Khan-I.	89
	ii. Yasmin Behram (1/34)	Do	87
	iii. Gulshan Bibi (1/34)		32
21	Saeeda Batool Nasir (1/17)	PK-68, D.I.Khan-V.	1234
22	Gulana Bibi (1/21)	PK,-69, Tank.	37
23	Hazrat Bibi (1/19)	PK-72, Bannu-III.	114
24	Hanifa advocate (1/17)*	PK-84, Swat-V.	220

**it shows the number of contesting candidates in the constituency. The nominator indicates female contesters and denominator indicates the total number of contesters (male and female) in the constituency.*

Riffat Begum, a 50 years old woman, is a social worker of District Mardan and President of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Women-Wing. When the party refused to give her ticket in the general elections, she contested elections from PK-23, Mardan-I, independently. Prior to it, she had won the Local Government Elections of 2002 and 2005 and served twice as woman councilor in Mardan (Rifat, 2016).

She says that:

“I am not disappointed with the decision of my party which could not award me ticket for elections nor am I upset on the defeat of 2013 general elections. I had the courage and will to contest elections on my own. Even if I have lost the elections, I will be remembered as independent contender” (Rifat, 2016).

While commenting on the general elections of 2013, Farhat Begum says that:

“The general elections of 2013 are a hall-mark in the political history of Mardan, as more women contested elections in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as well in Mardan. 14 women from KP and FATA contested election for the NA of Pakistan in which one each contested elections from Bajaur and Dir, the most conservative and religious parties dominated parts of the country. Similarly, 29 women contested elections for the PA of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on 99 general seats. Today, they have contested elections from Mardan, Dir and Bajaur, but tomorrow women of Buneer, Shangala, and Kohistan etc. will also contest elections. It is a political journey of women empowerment which still has a long way to go. Certainly, such episodic participation will boost-up the spirit of their sisters in the other parts of the country” (Farhat, 2016).

Women – As Election Campaigners

As election campaigning is an integral part of electoral processes in democracy. Contesting candidates not only educate voters about political developments but also encourage them to participate in state affairs. As far as women and election campaign are concerned, it is not an easy task for them even in developed societies. But in the general elections of 2013, Pakistani women launched elections campaign enthusiastically (FAFEN, 2014). They not only launched elections

campaigns for themselves but also for male siblings, relatives, friends or party colleagues. For example, Maryam Nawaz launched election campaign for her father (Mr. Muhammad Nawaz Sharif; President of Pakistan Muslim League) who contested election Lahore Constituency (Ghosh, 2013). This incredible change was observed in every constituency across the country in the general elections of 2013.

The KP Province also reflected the episode of rich political campaigning in the 2013 general elections. It is also a self-evident fact that this province is intensely affected by war against terror than any other part of Pakistan. Radical forces and Taliban had also threatened the male politicians for their elections campaigning and state machinery for its electoral processes (FATA research Centre, 2013). This was the main reason that in-door elections campaigning were conducted by their women either by their mothers, sisters, daughters, relatives, friends, or party-workers (Bushra, 2016). The ECP had also declared some districts of KP; like Peshawar, Charsadda, Mardan, Swabi, Malakand, Kohat etc. red-zone districts for election-day (AFP, 2013).

Shazia Aurangzeb left no stone un-turned in her election campaign. She visited each and every corner of Mardan city. Markets, shops, bazars and houses were visited. She met with the people personally and conveyed her party manifesto to them. She says that people warmly welcomed me and ensured me for support on Election Day (Aurangzeb, 2016). Similarly, Lal Baha visited the villages of Babini, Char-Bandha, Kodinaka, Shankar, Fatma, Gaddar, Sawaldher, Bakhshali etc. personally and met with the people. She said that once I went to village Kodinaka during election campaign where the people were coming out from the Jamia mosque after Salat-e-Aasar. Most of the people were aged having white-beards and strong stout personalities. They were also accompanied by the youngsters. I delivered my speech and conveyed my message in front of the Jamia mosque and received big clapping. Soon, I realized myself and found in a huge gathering around. First, I got scared and later determined as it was my first occasion to face such a huge gathering around myself (Baha, 2016).

Mehr-Taj-Roghani (Deputy Speaker of KP Assembly) says that:

“I myself conducted election campaigns in my village Sawaldher and various Union Councils; like Gaddar, Fatma, Hamza Khan, Bakhshali, Gujrat, Galyarah etc. I had never seen such houses and never met with people whom I visited during elections campaigning. I launched election campaigns for two candidates of Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf named; Mr. Atif Khan on PK-30, Mardan-VIII, and Mujahid Khan from NA-11, Mardan-III. I also tried to create social and political awareness among women of the rural areas to participate in the state affairs accordingly. Women had to ask about their political rights if they want greater participation. Certainly, changes are coming in politics as more women are participating now. Today, women are more vocal, more active, and more visionary. They feel proud to address their issues by themselves.” (Roghani, 2016)

Conclusion

The general elections of 2013 have witnessed that women participated more actively compared to earlier elections. The elections brought to limelight the fact that women of old age, young age, mothers with children, and even dis-abled women came along with their families, neighbors, relatives and friends and exercised their right to vote. In the general elections of 2013, 3.5% party tickets were issued to women. Most of the women contested elections independently. Similarly, low female turnout was due to several factors which include poor or no separate

transportation to polling stations, combined or too small polling stations (of even one-room). Inadequate facility of washrooms and insufficient furniture for female polling staff. Despite many hiccups the 2013 general elections in Pakistan show increased level of women participation in district Mardan compared to 2002 and 2008 general elections

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