

Causes of Low Women Political Participation

A Case Study of Dhurnal, Dholar (Chakwal) and Laliani (Sargodha)

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Abstract

The focus of my research is to investigate the reasons of low women political participation and issue of barring women to vote in three locations Dhurnal and Dholar in Chakwal and Laliani in Sargodha. Constitution of Pakistan ensures women equal and full political participation but their role in electoral and political process is significantly low. Empirical researches suggest that socio-economic reasons including gender, caste, class and extreme religious interpretations results for low women political participation. According to Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), there are over 12 million less women voters as compared to men in electoral lists in Pakistan and without filling the gap in electoral list, the equal women political participation is not possible. The women voter turnout in 2018 General Elections remained only 40 percent with only 21 of 46 million registered women voters used the right to vote. Furthermore, there are many areas including Dhurnal, Dholar and Laliani where the women voter turnout remained significantly low and women were even barred to use their right to vote. The research investigates the hurdles in low women political participation and low voter turnout of these areas with the help of primary and secondary data.

There is a research gap in the field of women political participation and no comprehensive qualitative research has carried out in Dhurnal, Dholar and Laliani to investigate the situation of low women political participation. I have conducted semi-structured interviews with fifteen (15) women in each location and five (5) interviews from civil society representatives who have extensive experience working on women political participation. I have also gathered the secondary data from election observation reports of different civil society organizations and voter turnout data from ECP.

The data reveals due to gender discrimination in the area, religious interpretations, community collective decisions to bar women to vote, issues in getting CNICs and voter registration, low literacy rate, lack of civic education and distance of polling stations are main reasons of low women political participation and low women turnout. State has introduced progressive legislation including 10 percent women voter turnout requirement in each constituency, such legislations helped the women to increase their participation in electoral and political participation however still there is need to introduce and implement a comprehensive approach to address all hurdles including socio-economic to ensure electoral participation of women.

Key Words: Women political participation, Women voter turnout, Right to vote

Introduction

I start my thesis with golden wording of Quid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah the father of the nation that shows the guiding principles regarding role of women in all spheres of society. “No nation can rise to the height of glory unless your women are side by side with you; we are victims of evil customs. It is crime against humanity that our women are shut up within the four walls of the houses as prisoners. There is no sanction anywhere for the deplorable condition in which our women have to live. You should take your women along with you as comrades in every sphere of life”. (Muhammad Ali Jinnah, 1944)

Globally women’s political participation lags behind that of men. Women political participation remained a challenge in modern history of the world. Continuous and rigorous struggle made it possible to ensure women political participation. In modern democracies such as United State the right to vote for women ensured after decades long fight in women’s suffrage movement. In 1920 first time in the history of USA, women used their right to vote. ¹ Most of developed nations provided constitutional cover to ensure women right to vote in 20th century and the gulf and Arab countries such as Kuwait, United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia the right has been granted as recent as in 21st century.

The situation of women political participation in developing countries such in Pakistan is challenging due to multiple socio-economic factors. Pakistan is the second largest Muslim country in terms of population. Pakistani politics is parliamentary in nature under framework of 1973 constitution. Pakistan has bicameral parliament that is composed of two houses, the Senate (upper house) and the National Assembly (lower house). The country has weak democracy as since the birth of Pakistan in 1947 it has been ruled by powerful military dictators. Elected government in the country remained in struggled to complete their constitutional terms and the governments remained dismissed by presidents or removed from power by army chiefs. According to Hassan Askari Rizvi- “Democracy in Pakistan faced a host of difficulties which did not let the democratic principles, institutions and processes develop firm roots in the polity”.

Due to continuous interruptions in elected government, the democratic system in Pakistan has been weak and hostile. During 1980’s and 1990’s the democracy was derailed by military dictators and presidential dissolving the government. The elected government remained fragile and their policies remained unstable due to frequent interruptions and the trust of general public shattered due to inconsistency of the system. ² This resulted in weak democratic institutional mechanism in the country.

Women are about half of Pakistan’s population. Due to many social, political and economic hurdles, the political participation of women in Pakistan remains very low, particularly in rural areas of Pakistan³- The country has deep disparities in women political participation, on the one hand, Pakistan has examples of great women leaders who played critical and significant role in independence of the country such as Mohtrama Fatima Jinnah, Begum Ra'ana Liaquat Ali Khan,

¹ <https://www.history.com/topics/womens-history/women-who-fought-for-the-vote-1>

² <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/democracy-in-pakistan-elections-tell-us-why-politicians-behave-badly/>

³ Determinants of Female Employment Status in Pakistan- Pakistan Journal of Commerce and Social Sciences 2015, Vol. 9 (2), 418-437

Viqar un Nisa Noon etc. On the other hand, there are still areas in Pakistan where women are barred to vote. Article 25 of the constitution of Pakistan ensures equality of all citizens but its implementation in women political participation is not true in Pakistan. Pakistan's international commitments also require the country to ensure women political participation such as the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Furthermore, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) Order of 2002, the Political Parties Order of 2002 and the Election Act 2017 also provided a legal cover to increase the women political participation.

Malik and Aamir (2017) described the role of women in politics and argued that women in Pakistan remained active in politics at all levels particularly their role as mobilization during election phase remained remarkable. They remained instrumental to mobilize women voters to take part in electoral process. Their participation in local bodies, provincial and national level elections also remained very active and meaningful. Women have been taken to collective and individual political activism during all critical historical phases of Pakistan such as Pakistan Independence Movement, fight against the Hudood ordinances under the Zia regime and during the various elections, their presence in the decision-making bodies of both political parties and national institutions has been minimal. Their voices remained unheard as compared to their population and their historical participation.

According to Heinrich Boell Stiftung (HBS) 2018 report, women political participation has significantly improved at national level when the quota was allocated for women to participated in political process in federal and provincial assemblies including senate. To increase the women political participation, as per election act, 2017- all political parties are now required to award at least 5 percent of tickets to women to contest on general seats in general elections. Political participation of women as candidates and voters is critical, as without their role in decision making, the development of a country is not possible. Women face a number of obstacles in their political participation in Pakistan. Socio-economic factors and different existing patriarchal customs lead to the low political participation of women.

The women representation was increased through quota and 33% seats were allocated to women to increase their political participation but women political participation as a voter is still significantly low. Women's voter registration and the voter turnout among women also must be considered in order to understand the state of women political participation in Pakistan. According to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), women voter turnout in the 2018 general elections remained 40 percent and still a huge number of women were not able to use their right to vote. This was the first time that Election Commission has recorded and issues gender segregated voter turnout data in compliance with the provisions of Section 91 of the Elections Act, 2017. There is huge gender disparity in voter lists and women in politics. According to Election Commission of Pakistan, there are still over 12 million women who need voter registration as without voter registration no citizen can use their right to vote. In Pakistan no voter can use their right to vote without Computerized National Identity Cards (CNICs) and voter registration. National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) is responsible for CNIC registration and Election Commission is for voter registration. As it required pre-requisite documentations such as Form B, marriage certificate, school certificates etc to eligible for CNICs and women in some cases do not have such documentations. On the other hand, NADRA centers to register CNICs are far flung

areas in rural areas so it is very difficult for women to travel and get their CNICs. This is one of the reasons that the number is so high for women who do not have their CNICs.

Zaheer (2015) argued about hurdles of women in their political participation as in Pakistan the situation of women political empowerment is not up to the mark. Despite increased in number of seats in parliament the state of women in different sectors remained minimal. Still women are facing many problems to their political empowerment and political participation in Pakistan. There are still areas where women political and electoral participation is significantly low. The socio-economic factors are such factors which are considered as barriers to their advancement.

According to Election Commission of Pakistan, It has been observed that women's political participation as voters in general and local government elections are significantly low, particularly in Potohar region⁴ where in some Union Councils women were barred to vote in General Election 2013, Punjab Local Government Elections 2015⁵ and General Elections-2018. Despite the constitution provides the equal opportunity of women political participation, there has been incidents in Pakistan, where women were barred to vote. Only in General Election 2018, women in Shangla (Khyber Pakhtoonkha), Dhurnal (Chakwal) and Laliani (Sargodha) were barred to vote. Earlier in General Elections 2013 and Local Government Elections 2015, Dholar (Chakwal) was also in the list where women were barred to vote. According to the new policy if the women voter turnout remained less than 10 percent in a constituency the election results will declare nullify. This rule has been introduced in elections reforms prior to General Elections-2018. In this context, the polls in Shangla declared null and void by Election Commission of Pakistan because no women polled the vote in the whole constituency. This is the first time in the history of Pakistan that Election Commission declared the elections null and void and re-polled on the basis of barring women to vote. On the other hand in Dhurnal and Laliani the women voter turnout remained less than 10 percent but the rule applies at constituency level so the election was not declared null and void in these locations.

Statement of Problem:

The women electoral participation as a voter is significantly low in three areas i. Dhurnal, Chakwal, ii. Dholar, Chakwal and iii. Laliani, Sargodha. Due to socio-economic factors, women cannot independently use their right to vote and they are barred to since 1960's. Despite of relatively better literacy rate as compared to other districts of Punjab, the women voter turnout in these areas remained either zero or significantly low. In General Elections 2013 and Local Government Elections-2015 not a single woman used their right to vote in above-mentioned locations as they were not allowed to vote. In General Elections-2018, women voter turnout in district Chakwal remained highest as compared to men⁶ but still the turnout of women in Dhurnal and Dholar remained significantly low and only 14 women used the right to vote in Dhurnal. In Laliani no women polled the vote till 2:00 pm until the civil society and Election Commission intervened. The women in same districts can use their right to vote but the issue of barring women to vote only exists in abovementioned three locations.

⁴ Potohar region includes the current four districts of Jhelum, Chakwal, Rawalpindi, Attock

⁵ PODA Election observation report 2013 and 2015

⁶ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1788276/1-women-chakwal-make-hi/>

Research Questions:

The research is focused on investigating the main hurdles in women's political participation particularly low women voter turnout in the three areas, Dhurnal, Dholar in Chakwal and Laliani in Sargodha. The main research question is to investigate "What are the challenges and obstacles faced by women to use their right to vote and political participation in above mentioned three locations?" o examine patterns and trends to address women's low political participation in the three locations Dhurnal and Dholar in Chakwal and Laliani in Sargodha. What are socio-political factors and historical prospective that restricts women political participation? Other questions that are looked in this research include: What are the pre-requisite documents for women to use to vote and what are the hurdles to obtain the pre-requisite documents in three locations? What are the patterns of women voters and do they vote independently? What are reasons of barring women to vote?

Hypothesis:

Due to socio-economic and political reasons the women political participation and women voter turnout is low in Dhurnal and Dholar in Chakwal and Laliani in Sargodha and they are not allowed to use their right to vote.

Limitations of Research:

Only three locations are selected for research where women were barred to vote. There are also some other locations where women were barred to vote, but to financial and administrative constraints the main research will be confined to three locations.

Objective of the Research:

1. To understand the hurdles to women political participation as voter in Dhurnal and Dholar in Chakwal and Laliani in Sargodha.
2. What are the laws, institutional mechanisms and international commitments available and its implementation to ensure women political participation?
- 3.

Research Methodology

This research method is qualitative in order to identify the various barriers hindering political participation of women in Dhurnal and Dholar in Chakwal and Laliani in Sargodha. The research methodology focus is on the collection of data by snowball sampling and proof of hypothesis. This research analysis is qualitative in nature. Primary and secondary data is used to analyze the trends of women in electoral and political process like gender segregated data of voter turnout and electoral rolls. Sample size for primary data is 15 (Fifteen) from each area in Dhurnal and Dholar in Chakwal and Laliani in Sargodha to assess the issues and hurdles for women for their effective political participation where women were barred to vote. Semi structured interviews with 5 (Five) civil society experts who have been working on women political participation is conducted. The research is helpful to understand the reasons of barring women in Dhurnal, Dholar and Laliani and it is also helping the policy makers to formulate policy to ensure women

political participation. Low women political participation is dependent variable and socio-political and economic factors are independent variable.

Qualitative Analysis: In analysis primary data as well as secondary data is used to proof the hypothesis.

Research tool: Semi-structured Interview

The primary data collected through the snowball technique by the semi-structured interviews.

Research Tool	Dhurnal, Chakwal	Dholar, Chakwal	Laliani, Sargodha	Civil Society Experts	Sample Size
Semi Structured Interviews	15 Women	15 Women	15 Women	5	50

Significance of the Research:

The significance of the study is that it would be a source of information for researchers and scholars. This research is a good addition in the existing literature of women political participation and gender role in politics. There are only a few researches on women political participation and no research has been done to inquire the reasons of barring women in Dhurnal, Dholar and Laliani. It will also help the policy makers to make decisions and formulate policies to ensure women political participation particularly in rural areas like Dhurnal, Dholar and Laliani. To understand the existing trends of women voter turnout and analyses of gender gap in electoral lists is very important to learn how these gaps can be reduced to increase the number of women participating in electoral process.

Scope of Research:

Finding reasons of barring women to use their right to vote is an important. The research has been focused in three areas Dhurnal, Dholar and Laliani. Prior researches have been done generally but not focused on specific area as a case study. The scope of this research has focused on rural areas of three locations and where literacy rate is relatively higher but women political participation is low.

Literature Review

Literature review showed different views of the different authors regarding causes of low women political participation in Pakistan. According to the different authors and researchers due to socio, political factors and patriarchal society, women political participation is low in Pakistan. However, there is no specific research on why women are barred to vote particularly in rural areas of Pakistan.

Naqvi and Khan (2018) described the causes of barring women to vote as in Pakistan, socio-political issues to bar women from voting include agreements amongst political parties and religious leaders. These are serious constraint to women political participation in some rural areas

of the Pakistan. Despite the new law and 10 percent requirement of women voter turnout in each constituency, still in General Elections-2018 it emerged women in the Shangla were barred from voting. In many other parts of the country women were barred to vote.

Awan (2016) in a research study very clearly mentioned the hurdles in women political participation, he narrated that the reasons behind low political participation of women as the women are dependent on men and they are not financially independent to take the decisions at household level and community level and they cannot participate in electoral and political process without the consent of men counterparts.

Akhlaq and Anwar (2017) argue in a research study on Femininity and Women Political Participation in Pakistan about women political participation. They narrated that women voter turnout has increased over the period of time and more and more women got registered and electoral lists and number of women who voted have also increased. Due to less or no acceptability of women participating in electoral and political process at rural areas of Pakistan creates a lot of hurdles for women to vote and participate in electoral process.

Xavier and Ghazala (2013) described female voting behavior in Pakistan and shared that rural face multiple hurdles in free mobilization to go outside and use their right to vote. Due to lack of accessibility to different resources, they cannot access polling related information and cannot go to polling stations on polling day to use their right to vote.

Arfan (2015) described in his research study about male's perception about female political participation. Despite of constitutional provisions to ensure women political participation, women face multiple socio-cultural hindrances particularly due to subordination role, they cannot decide without the consent of the men and the perception of men regarding women political participation also play significant role in ensuring women right to vote.

Asif (2017) in a research study narrated the case study of lower Dir where women were barred to vote. His research findings included the role of religion in barring women to take part in politics. Religion plays an important role in interpretation of women right to vote, people commonly perceive women political participation as an un-Islamic. The conservative school of thought regarding religious interpretation bar women right to vote and confine them within the boundaries of home.

Bari (2005) in a research stated that women socio-political and economic factors contributed in low women political participation of women. She argued that women in general have less economic empowerment and their dependence on men creates a lot of hindrances for them to decide about their political and electoral choices, hence restricts their political participation.

UNDP (2005) in a research study described the gender parity issues in electoral lists as women are about half of the country's population but there are 12 million less women voters as compared to men. Voter registration and CNIC are pre-requisite of using the right to vote and without these documents and listing, the women political and electoral participation will remain low.

Mansuri (2011) has stated motivations behind women voting pattern in a research study. She described that women in developing countries face multiple hurdles in using their right to vote and their choices and opinions in electoral and political process. The socio-political factors in Pakistan are not friendly for women to participate in voting process and their responsibilities to do the

domestic chores, security issues, violence and community discouragement for women to engage in political process restricts their right to vote and their engagements in electoral participation. Lack of civic education and illiteracy also contributes in restriction in women political participation. The women who are illiterate and have no information about voting process tend to participate less in political process. The literacy rate contributes positively in women political participation.

National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) (2010) highlighted the issues of low women electoral participation as the women in Pakistan are not much active in politics. The state has made legislations to improve the women state of political participation however not much has done to address the social issues such as patriarchal social setup that is a major hindrance in women political participation. The gender inequality at all steps of political participation can only be addressed through a comprehensive approach to ensure women can independently take part in electoral process.

According to ninth edition of the Global Gender Gap Report 2016 Pakistan is ranked second last in gender equality. The report highlighted huge gender discriminations in all walks of life including the political and electoral participation of women. The report suggested the government of Pakistan to take necessary steps to work on gender equality and meet its international commitments to uplift the status of women in the country.

Asian Development Bank (ADB) 2005 published a policy paper “Women in Pakistan” and presented different issues of women in Pakistan, particularly in politics. The constitution of Pakistan provides gender equality and asks for affirmative actions to ensure gender equality including equal participation in politics and electoral process.

Sattar (2015) in World Times described historical political participation of women in Pakistan “From 1999 to 2008, under General Pervez Musharraf, Pakistan’s Majlis-e-Shoora passed the Women’s Protection Bill while the cabinet also approved reservation of 10% quota for women in Central Superior Services and 5% quota for women across the board in all government departments. Besides this, women’s quota in local governments was also enhanced to 30% but it was later reduced to 17.5% under the Legal Framework Order (LFO) 2002”.

Highlighting issues of women barring to use their right to vote, Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) in a research study (2013) on Barriers to Women’s Political Participation in Punjab described the reasons on low women political participation as there are less women voters as compared to men voters despite of equal population of women. Women even barred to vote in different constituencies in elections 2013. In barring women to vote, political parties, community elders and religious leaders have integral role as they came in to an agreement to bar the women to vote. Government must take steps to address these issues and ensuring women political participation.

Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (2012) in a report pointed out the issue of barring women to vote as restricting women to vote is against the constitutional right of women to use their right to vote. Women in Pakistan were barred to vote in elections and despite of reports and complete evidences, election commission has not declared any elections null and void. This is due to lack of legislations, laws and policies to ensure women political participation. All persons who restrict women political participation should be treated under the law.

Khan (2017) described the gender gap in electoral participation in Pakistan and stated that in 2013 General Elections the voter turnout data shows that gender gap in voter turnout has increased in 2015. The main reason of low women voter turnout was that there is gender gap in electoral lists. The full participation of women in elections is not possible until the women are registered in electoral lists. This issue of not registered in electoral list is severe in rural areas as compared to urban areas.

Siddique (2015) examined Women empowerment through representation in Pakistan and stated that women empowerment in all spheres of life is very important and empowerment in one sector can contribute the empowerment in other sector. For example, the women who are economically empowered have more mobility and access to information; hence her political empowerment is more. Likewise, the women who are socially empowered have tendency to participate more in electoral participation due to more participation in decision making. The women who are more politically empowered will automatically empowered in economic and social spheres. Each one of the empowerments complements the other.

Suggesting legal measures to ensure women political participation, Zafar (2018) in a research study pointed out that despite the constitutional and legal guarantees to ensure women political participation, women face many hurdles in political participation. Therefore, it is strongly recommended to review electoral laws and amend it. There has been amendment in Representation of People Act (ROPA) where the Election Commission has an authority to declare the elections null and void where the women voter turnout remained under 10 percent but still more needs to done to ensure women political participation.

Mjahid and Haq (2016) argued in a research paper that in a society like a Pakistan, men have more control in different resources and women have lack of access to resources. Even the high literate women have not as much control over resource as the men have, this uneven distribution of resources reflects on all sectors of women life including the political participation and independent decision making in electoral and political process. This social phenomenon restricts the women political participation.

Aurat Foundation (2010) in a research study described the causes of low women political participation as women are about half of the population of the country but their political participation is significant low. The women face issues in CNIC and voter registration and this is the reason of gender gap in electoral lists. Due to huge gender parity in electoral lists women cannot use their right to vote and even face restrictions to vote on polling day.

Sarah (2017) argued about low women registration in electoral rolls and shared that low registration in electoral rolls is the cause of low women political participation. There are huge gender inequalities at all levels of women political participation in Pakistan and the main causes for the inequalities includes huge gender gap in electoral lists, socio-political and economic factors and illiteracy particularly in rural areas contributes in low women political participation.

Mumtaz (2005) described socio-economic reasons for low women political participation as there are a lot of reasons that limits women political participation including gender inequality, poverty, extreme interpretation of religion that restrict women mobility, violence. All these factors keep women out of politics and electoral process. To ensure women political participation, the state of women empowerment needs to increase at all levels.

Salwa (2014) discussed significant role of Pakistani women in democracy and politics. She highlighted contributions of leading women politicians as number of women politicians participated in parliamentary affairs and contributed in legislations. Pakistani parliamentary history has witnessed leading women politicians including Benazir Bhutto (Muslim world's first-ever women head of government) and Dr. Fahmida Mirza, the first ever women speaker in Pakistan. There are also more women politicians in Pakistan who devoted their whole life in politics and for the promotion of democracy. In a society like Pakistan where women political participation has a lot of difficulties, the women politicians made a history.

Bari (2015) discussed the challenges of women politicians in Pakistan as they face multiple challenges on the floor of assembly and their contributions have challenged by their male counterparts. Women parliamentarians are not treated equally by their colleagues in the parliament as they think that they have no constituency and they were elected by the votes of people. There is also acceptance issue as quota seats has increased the number of the women in the parliament and men parliamentarians question their presence and even feel reluctant when the women parliamentarians receive development funds.

Moheyuddin (2005) in a research study stated that due to women's low electoral participation women in Pakistan have a very limited role in the formulation of social policies at national and provincial level. Women have very limited role in decision-making at all levels and their contributions in governance and politics has been low. Due to male dominance in different sectors of society there are in-built inequalities in governance and political structure.

Sarwet (2014) described different hurdles for women political participation and described that in Pakistan historically women were kept away from the mainstream politics and different factors contributed in to this particularly structural issues, culture, socio-economic factors and low facilitation to women to participate in political process. Despite the multiple hurdles the Pakistan has produced leading women in politics. Over the period of time the participation of women as a voter and representatives increased and legislations and policies have also contributed in ensuring women political participation.

Common Wealth (2013) in election observation report described issue of huge gender parity in electoral rolls that limits women political participation. There is a gender gap in electoral lists and despite of efforts by different organizations there is still huge gap that needs to be addressed to ensure women political participation. number of women on the electoral roll remains substantially lower than the number of men. Based on election commission figures there are over 10 million fewer women than men. The efforts for registering women is positive but still a lot more needs to be done to register over 10 million women as voter to ensure their political and electoral participation. As CNIC is mandatory for voter registration so addressing the issue of gender parity in electoral lists there is need to introduce a mechanism where maximum women can obtain CNIC.

Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN)-(2018) in a report described voter turnout trend in General Elections-2018 that national voter turnout decreased marginally from 53.62% in 2013 to 51.99% in General Election 2018 but 8.45 million more voters turned out to vote as compared to General Election 2013 this shows the overall trust of citizens on the democratic process. Surprisingly, the women voter turnout in Chakwal remained higher than male as men turn out recorded 55.68 percent and women turnout recorded 60.72 percent in General Elections 2018 but

in the same district in union council Dhurnal and Dholar the women voter turnout remained substantially low and the women were barred to vote. However, in Laliani (Sargodha) overall women voter turnout remained as low as 46.65 percent as compared to men voter 58.45 percent.⁷

Hassan and Rauf (2015) in a research study discussed low women political participation due to socio-economic factors as Pakistani society is a male dominated society. Women do not have a significant position in the politics at grass-root democratic political process. Women voters are not encouraged to cast their vote and they are not provided conducive environment to participate in electoral process. In some of the constituencies even the candidates and political parties sign an agreement on the question of disallowing women voters and barring women to use their right to vote, particularly in rural areas of Pakistan. Therefore, a large portion of society is kept away from polling stations during elections.

European Union Election Observation Mission Report (2018) discussed state of women political participation in General Elections 2018. Women were reportedly barred to vote in at least eight constituencies in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab upon agreements between local elders and political parties. As per Elections Act 2017 the election will declare null and void in a constituency if women turnout is less than ten percent. Even the harassment cases were reported on polling day. By and large international standards were not implemented to ensure women political participation.

The available literature review provides general hurdles of women political participation and lacks finding the causes of women low political participation particularly at voters' end. There is no such comprehensive research carried out in Potohar region particularly in Dholar, Dhurnal and Laliani to investigate the reasons of barring women to vote. The research causes of low women political participation in rural areas of Dhurnal, Dholar and Laliani is a good addition in literature review and comprehensive to identify causes of women's low political participation in three locations. The section of international commitment and legislations is helpful to understand the available government's commitment to ensure women political participation.

State of Women Political Participation in Pakistan

This section is an analysis of current status of women political participation in Pakistan. Different socio-political factors that restrict women political participation, voter registration, women voter turnout and the incidents of barring women to vote in Pakistan are discussed in this section.

Women's political participation is indicator to measure gender equality. According to the census 2017, women constitute half the Pakistan's population of 207 million citizens, and of the overall 97 million registered voters, 42 million is women. In Pakistan, there is no constitutional bar on the political participation of women. However, since the independence of the country, women's political participation and representation in decision-making institutions has remained minimal or very low. Socio-economic factors as well as existing structures are considered as barriers to their advancement in the political life. Efforts are being made in Pakistan to increase women's political participation as voter and as member of the parliament through legislative measures but still a lot more needs to be done to ensure women political participation.

⁷ <http://fafen.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/FAFEN%E2%80%99S-Analysis-of-Voter-Turnout-in-GE-2018.pdf>

Generally, women's social situation to men is of systematic subordination as the women has to take care of domestic chores and men is considered as bread earner that enhances their value in socio gender status. Men and women activities are considered as inside and outside, where this is the understood unwritten understanding in our society that women have to take care inside home affairs and men has to take care outside factors such as economic activities, these roles limit the women mobility, hence limits the role in politics. Men are given more opportunities to get education where women have limited resources to go for education. As per Economic Survey of Pakistan 2017, women literacy rate is 45 percent against men literacy rate that is 69 percent. The same gap exists in voter lists and voter turnout. This situation leads to women in subordination role and their dependence on men in different spheres of life. Women have a limited role in the formulation of economic and social policies as they have low representation at parliament at all levels. Due to male dominance in Pakistani politics, the voices of women are unheard in national political and governance system and they remain unrepresented in policy formulation.

The constitution of Pakistan put no restrictions or any hurdles on women's political participation. However, they have very nominal role in political parties and political structure. After the reserved seats were allocated to women through quota system in 2002, the parliament has witnessed increased number of women and they also contributed substantially in legislations. On consideration of women's invisibility in national politics, the provision of women's reserved seats in parliament existed throughout the constitutional history of Pakistan from 1956 to 1973. Initially the quota was 3 percentage which with the passage of time reached to 33 percentage.

Political parties play significant role in ensuring women political participation. So far, there is no significant increased political participation within the political parties as only a few women in leading positions in major political parties. Furthermore, political parties award only limited tickets to women to contest on general seats, most of the women awarded tickets on reserved women seats. Only a few women are seen on the list of central executive committees of political parties. In Pakistan, all political parties have specified their women's wings. However, the membership of women's wings is smaller than the male membership of the party.

Another main hurdle of women political participation is general perception towards politics. Jabeen and Jadon (2018) in a research study elaborated this phenomenon as politics in Pakistan is considered as a dirty game and people associates politics with corruption and violence. The people belonging to lower middle class consider as politics only a business of rich people and they think politics is out of bound for women and they should not engage this dirty game. Furthermore, the politics is dominated by feudal and tribal mindset keeping no space for common people. Gender role in Pakistani society further put women at a disadvantageous position in politics by providing men more prominent roles in governance. This perception limits women participation in political life. Men decide for women where to vote and sometimes even not to vote and bar the women to use their right to vote.

Women as a voter also face a lot of problems to use their right to vote and participate effectively in democratic and electoral process. Women voters remained under-represented in 2018 elections. The election results show that turnout of women voters was around 40 percent, which means around 21 million out of the 46 million registered women voters came out to exercise their right to vote.¹ According to FAFEN 2018 report their significant increase in the number of voters registration between the two general elections from 86.18 million in 2013 to 105.96 million in 2018. There is power politics involved in civil documentation as most of the time men do not feel

comfortable to register the women and get CNICs as this may leads that women demand lands etc. The number of men voters who polled their votes was about 60 percent of the registered men voters.² Also, election result in two of the constituencies had to be declared invalid because the turnout of women voters there was less than 10 per cent.³ There are reports that in a number of constituencies most women were barred from polling their votes and a small number was allowed to vote “to fulfill the bare minimum voting requirements laid down in the Election Act 2017.”⁴ There is huge gender disparity in voter lists as still over 12 million women do not have their identity cards hence ineligible to use their right to vote. To register all women in voter lists and to issue them CNICs to get them eligible to use their right to vote, The National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW), has estimated that it will take 18 years to bridge the existing gap between men and women voters if 5,000 new CNICs are issued to women every day. An analysis of NADRA’s registration capacity shows that it cannot achieve even that target. On average, it can issue 6,966 CNICs every day 3,862 to men and 3,104 to women. These numbers suggest it may take close to 27 years to end the existing gap between men and women voters. Put increase in the population into the mix and a solution will look like it’s almost impossible in near future.⁸

After promulgation of Election Act, 2017 that required Election Commission of Pakistan to declare a constituency’s result null and void if at least 10 percent women turnout not recorded. There have areas where women were barred to vote including my research area (Dhurnal, Chakwal, Dholar, Chakwal and Laliani, Sargodha). It was first time in 2015 by-polls in the electoral history of the country when results of PK-95 in Dir Lower were declared null and void owing nonparticipation of women voters. Before that there were many reports where women were barred to vote but election were not declared null and void. In Local Government Elections 2015, in a union council, Dhurnal not a single woman came out to vote and an organization Potohar Organization for Development Advocacy (PODA) filed a petition to Election Commission to declare the election null and void but the results were not declared void due to non-existence of legislation and policies. Likewise, Women were allowed to cast their votes in Hali Banda area of Achini on the outskirts of Peshawar on General Elections 2018 day after the Election Commission of Pakistan took notice of locals barring female voters in NA-29 and PK-71 from exercising their right to votes.⁹

Only in General Elections 2018, women political participation remained significant low as on the one hand there is huge gender gap in voter list and on the other hand there are a lot of hurdles for women to use their right to vote. Women were not allowed to vote in Banda Sheikh Ismail in Nowshera while in village Trakha Nowshera female voters used their right of franchise for the first time. Meanwhile, only two votes were polled at three female polling stations in Swabi’s NA19 and PK-47 that shows significant low women political participation. In General Elections 2018, Shangla remained the only constituency where elections were declared null and void after getting less than 10 percent women voter turnout. There is a slight issue in 10 percent law, if women barred to vote in one union council and the overall constituency turnout get over 10 percent, the law then does not permit to declare the elections null and void. For example, in Dhurnal, Dholar and Laliani case, women are barred to vote in one union council but in overall constituency the turnout of women resulted more than 10 percent that in turn does not allow election commission to declare the election null and void.

⁸ <https://herald.dawn.com/news/1154065>

⁹ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1766054/1-women-voters-allowed-vote-na-29-ecp-takes-notice/>

There are many reasons behind barring women to vote. According to Guardian News, during General Elections 2013 in Upper Dir major political parties signed a written agreement barring women from voting and stipulating large fines for anyone breaking the agreement. In the end just one woman's vote was recorded. Likewise in the same elections, Nara Amazai a union council of Haripur district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) where women are barred from voting on elders' decision. Since 1947 women voters of Nara Amazai have never cast their votes in any of the national and provincial elections that shows the state of women political participation in Pakistan.

As per Section 9 of the Elections Act, 2017, Anyone found trying to restrict or bar women from voting face a prison sentence of up to three years, a fine of Rs 100,000 or both but still barring women to vote is done in very systematic way that the segments of society who barred the women to vote do not take this in a written rather on just verbal orders that in later difficult to identify and prosecute. Culture and tradition, in many underdeveloped countries women are not given their right to exercise their personal right but, in many instances, considered as if they were to follow or agree with whatever decision their male counterparts will have agreed on. The issue of female voting turn-out has a cultural phenomenon and a question of honor in the areas where according to people bringing out women for voting would bring bad names to their honor. This is the reason women are not free to vote and most of the time male counterparts decides where to vote or even not to vote. Men think that women know less than them and this is not their right to use their right to vote. Furthermore, due to lack of civic awareness, in certain contexts women may not see themselves as voters, and prefer to concentrate on domestic activities. Particularly in rural areas women also do not feel confident or politically informed to participate in political process. As majority of the women do not take part or take interest in day-to-day politics and after five years in Elections, they do not feel comfortable and confident to vote independently.

Sometimes the logistic issues also lead to limit women political participation such as distance of home from polling station and non-availability of basic facilities at polling stations like drinking water, latrines, sitting benches etc. Potohar Organization for Development Advocacy (PODA) in its Election Observation Report for General Elections-2013 pointed out that lack of facilities is one of the reasons of low women voter turnout. Most of the polling stations in rural areas set in government buildings such as schools, union council offices and basic health units, these buildings lack basic facilities so women feel reluctant to visit on polling day to use their right to vote. Transportation is another factor that limits women political participation as voters. If the distance of polling station from home is more than 1 KM, the women need transportation to visit to polling station to vote, if the transportations would not available the women voters would not go to polling stations to vote.

Religion is another obstacle for women to use their right to vote. The concept of Purdah (Veil) that limits women's movement outside the home limits. Since religion plays a significant role in Pakistan and the religious interpretations confine women within the boundaries of the home and do not allow them to go outside the home and visit mix gatherings of men and women. This is the reason in joint polling stations of men and a woman there is tendency of low women voter turnout as compare to the polling stations set exclusively for the women. One school of thought even considers women role in politics as an un-Islamic and against the basic preaching's of Islam. Rehman and Kiran (2015) argued about role of religion in women political participation as with the advent of Islam, women were given a right in electing their leaders. Prophet Muhammad

(PBUH) received bai-ah (oath) from the people. The Quran deals with the issue of women giving the bai-ah to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and Allah tells the prophet to accept the pledge of women.

Lack of sensitization about importance of vote is another key reason of low women political participation. Due to low literacy rate among the women particularly in rural women, they are not educated about importance of vote and their right to vote. The women in general take the voting as a casual activity and consider as men to participate in the electoral process. Their lack of opportunities to access the information on voting rights, cause their low political participation in Pakistan.

A marriage in other cities of women also restricts women electoral participation. In Pakistan a citizen can get CNIC once he/she turns to age of 18 and after getting CNICs their names are enlisted in voter lists. The women who get marry after getting CNICs will have to shift to her husband home (*Which in most of the cases situated in other cities as of parent home of women*). This needs to amend the address details in electoral lists. Due to long distance of home from Election Commission office and lack of sensitization women do not amend their lists in electoral lists so they can use their right to vote on polling day. There is need a mechanism where vote can automatically shift to the preferred location of women when she gets marries.

The political image of the country also plays a significant role as a motivation to use the right to vote. In developing country like Pakistan where politics considers as dirty game women gets very less motivation to use their right to vote. Furthermore, they experienced very little visible impact in their lives due to their voting so they are not much motivated to participate in electoral process. They consider that their single vote cannot make any difference and keep them away from voting.

Violence impacts the electoral participation of both men and women. Election violence is also a deterrent for women political and electoral participation in Pakistan. When election violence erupts either before, during or after elections, women who are always vulnerable to such violence and who feels so much for the kids would shy away from the cycle of registration with the view that the process will again bring violence which put them and their children in a disadvantaged position. For example, Baluchistan remained violence prone area and in result women political participation in the area remained very low as compared to other parts of the country. Likewise, the women in tribal set-ups have less political participation due to violent political history.

Conclusion:

The abovementioned narration shows that women in Pakistan face multiple issues that affect their political and electoral participation. The issues can be categorized in two sets i) social-political factors that further includes poverty, cultural bars due to women in subordination role in Pakistan, not having CNIC and voter registration particularly in rural areas, religious factors where women are not allowed to go outside without male member, lack of education and sensitization about importance of vote etc. ii) administrative and logistics factors that includes distance of home from polling stations that restricts women to go out to poll their vote, lack of facilities in polling station such as drinking water, latrines, sitting arrangements, no transportation facilities on polling day and far flung NADRA and Election Commission offices that prohibits women to go for CNIC and

voter registration. Both factors together become hurdles in women political participation. The government and other relevant stakeholders can overcome the administrative factors by providing access to women to CNICs and voter registration and providing adequate facilities at polling stations. Women voter education can also be used as a tool to mobilize the women to use their right to vote. The first and most important hurdle in women political participation is socio-cultural factors that take time in community change. According to 'Global Gender Gap Index 2018' report released by the World Economic Forum (WEF) Pakistan is the second worst country in the world in terms of gender parity, ranking 148 out of 149 countries.¹⁰ Pakistan occupies the last place in the South Asian ranking of gender gap. Considering such gender ranking, addressing socio-cultural issues to ensure women political participation in Pakistan is not an easy task. However, provisions in Election Act-2017 that requires at least 10 percent women voter turnout in each constituency and efforts by Election Commission to register women as voters may leads to change the state of women political participation.

Status of Implementation of Constitutional/Legal Provisions and International Commitments to Ensure Women Political Participation in Pakistan

This section is an analysis of constitutional provisions and Pakistan's international commitments and its implementation that ensures women political participation. Pakistan has signed different conventions and covenants that require Pakistan to take necessary steps and provide conducive environment to increase women political participation. The section has also an analysis of challenges in implementation of international commitments.

First time in a history in an international document United Nations Charter defined equal rights for men and women without any discrimination. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) provided equal rights and Pakistan become the signatory of the declaration in 1948. In this way all the United Nations declarations and resolutions of the United Nations Security Councils were applicable for Pakistan and Pakistan is legally bound to legislate accordingly on the basis of principles of declarations and resolutions. Pakistan adopted Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)¹¹ and its (Article 21) (1) says that everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives. (2) Everyone has the right of equal access to public service in his country. This principal guideline ensures equal participation of women in political and electoral process. UDHR provided policy guidelines which later on translated to other UN covenants and conventions that ensure freedoms, human rights including women political participation.

Although Constitution of Pakistan guarantees dignity, freedom and equality amongst citizens without discriminating them as gender but its actual application has not been experienced since the birth of the nation and in practice women are rarely equal to their male counterparts (SDPI-2008). The women remained neglected part of the society and they have marginalized role in mainstream politics and democratic system and this is due to inequality that exists in political process and the patriarchal negative perception about women political participation both as voter and representative. The women rights as equal citizen have always denied due to socio-cultural norms through promoting women segregation and even political participation at a very low level.

¹⁰ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1452284>

¹¹ http://www.un.org/en/udhrbook/pdf/udhr_booklet_en_web.pdf

Article 224 of the constitution of Pakistan¹² guarantees periodic elections as “A general election to the National Assembly or a Provincial Assembly shall be held within a period of sixty days immediately following the day on which the term of the Assembly is due to expire, unless the Assembly has been sooner dissolved, and the results of the election shall be declared not later than fourteen days before that day.” “Article 18 of the constitution provides equal space to women in every lawful profession, while Article 25 lays down the principles of non-discrimination and affirmative action in their case.” However, in Pakistan women’s political participation remained neglected at all levels until 2001, when the gender quota was reserved at the local, provincial and national level. Through a legislative provision 33 percent of seats were reserved for women in the local government and 17 percent in the national and provincial level.¹³ It took another 16 years when the state through legislation requires at least 10 percent women voter turnout in each constituency to validate the polls.¹⁴ This cannot solve the issue of women political participation completely as at constituency level women voter turnout could be 10 percent but it does not ensure the women voter turnout of at least 10 percent at union council level such as Dhunral, Dholar and Laliani. The women voter turnout remained over 10 percent in all three constituencies but at union council level the women voter turnout remained less than 10 percent except Dholar in General Elections 2018 and in all three locations in General Elections 2013 and Local Government Elections 2015.

The Government of Pakistan has ratified seven core Human Rights Conventions¹⁵, including the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Ratifying the international conventions requires the country to legislate as per the commitment of the convention. Following articles of the CEDAW also ensure women political participation and requires the state of Pakistan to legislate accordingly to ensure women political participation:

- States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular, shall ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right:(a) To vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies;
- (b) To participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government;
- (c) To participate in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country.¹⁶

The implementation of abovementioned articles exists in legal framework where there is no discrimination on the bases of gender in political and democratic participation. Women can contest the elections as of men and they can also vote as of men. There are no separate rules and regulations to vote or run the elections just on the bases of gender. Furthermore, the affirmative actions were also taken to ensure women political participation such as gender quota in parliament and minimum requirement for women voter turnout. The issue exists at socio-cultural level where the

¹² http://na.gov.pk/uploads/documents/1333523681_951.pdf

¹³ https://www.af.org.pk/pub_files/1358744372.pdf

¹⁴ <https://www.ecp.gov.pk/Documents/laws2017/Election%20Act%202017.pdf>

¹⁵ <http://www.mohr.gov.pk/uploads/reports/status%20of%20convention.pdf>

¹⁶ <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>

women are considered as subordinate and ownership of women. The women's less participation in decision making leads to low women political participation. The social transformation is required for effective implementation of legislations to ensure women political participation.

Pakistan has also adopted the convention on the Political Rights to Women, 1952¹⁷, to undertake concrete steps to ensure women' right to vote. However little of its commitment to ensure equal women political participation has been incorporated into national law and Pakistan's legal system still contains no definition or specific prohibition of discrimination. It is important to note that none of these conventions can be directly enforced. A number of them contain enforcement mechanisms, through inter-state complaint or individual complaint however, since Pakistan has not acceded to these specific provisions, its international commitments cannot be enforced. Women are underrepresented in terms of voter registration and in terms of electoral participation in Pakistan. Equal participation in politics for women is a prerequisite for effective and genuine democracy. The United Nations Charter prescribes a minimum of 33 percent representation of women in all representative bodies.¹⁸ However, the representation of women presently stands at 17 percent at the national level. According to Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) when Pakistan ratified the CEDAW in 1996, there was sufficient optimism for gender equality in the country. However, till date the articles of CEDAW are far from being implemented in Pakistan. Political participation, for example, is one area where, apart from poor progress, impediments are actually placed to prevent women from playing an active role in the democratic process. For implementation of CEDAW and Beijing Platform of Action, Government of Pakistan prepared National Plan in 1998¹⁹ however till date the women are barred to vote in many areas of Pakistan showed the poor implementation of CEDAW in Pakistan.

Pakistan officially participated in 1995 in the fourth World Conference on women in Beijing as called Beijing platform for action. The conference has shifted the global focus on gender equality and human rights.²⁰ In implementation of Beijing Platform of Action, Pakistan has committed to achieving 30 percent representations of women in leadership positions but still no proper implementation took place in Pakistan to ensure this commitment.

Comprised of 17 goals, 169 targets and 232 indicators, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted by 193 Member States to tackle a broad spectrum of challenges. Pakistan has also committed itself to meet the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with the objective of building on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The Goal 5 of SDGs ensures gender equality and its target 5.5 ensures equal women political participation²¹. However due to lack of coordination mechanism, lack of education and sensitization about SDGs there are a lot of ambiguities in implementation of SDGs. This is also need to know that Pakistan has failed to achieve MDGs and if no proper implementation mechanism will establish, Pakistan will fail to achieve its targets in SDGs. The Pakistani women face a lot of challenges due to a lack of implementation of international obligations and constitutional provisions that ensures women political participation.

¹⁷ https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg_no=XVI-1&chapter=16&lang=en

¹⁸ <http://www.criterion-quarterly.com/pakistan-and-the-convention-on-the-elimination-of-all-forms-of-discrimination-against-women/>

¹⁹ <http://www.ncsw.gov.pk/previewpublication/13>

²⁰ <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/Beijing%20full%20report%20E.pdf>

²¹ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs>

There are significant gaps in available laws, policies and actual practice on the ground regarding ensuring women political participation. Despite of laws still there are many reasons that women have restricted mobility, access to education, access to health facilities, lack of participation in decision-making and full participation in electoral and political process.

Conclusion:

Pakistan has provided equality of women in constitutions and ratified the conventions that ensure women political participation. In compliance of conventions and convents the state has also introduced progressive legislations for women empowerment in all spheres. The issue is effective implementation of legislations and policies. The implementation mechanism is too weak in Pakistan. After 18th amendment, the powers have devolved to provinces but still there are coordination and administrative issues in implementation of laws and policies. There is need to implement existing laws and policies and wider stakeholders such as communities and civil society organizations should be engaged. Regarding ensuring women political participation, the root cause issues need to be addressed and this could only happen to empower women economically, socially and politically.

Data Analysis

This section focuses on data analysis. The primary data collected through the semi-structured interviews from Dhurnal and Dohlar, District Chakwal and Laliani, District Sargodha and secondary data is collected through research reports, election observation reports of FAFEN, PODA, European Union, gender segregated data of voter turnout from Election Commission of Pakistan and related books on women political participation. Experts' semi-structured interviews were also carried out to assess the state of women political participation in Pakistan. Following is the analysis of each location data to understand the causes of low women political participation:

I. Dhurnal, District Chakwal

Dhurnal is a union council of District Chakwal in the Punjab Province of Pakistan and it is part of Tehsil Lawa of Chakwal. It is 79 kilometers from Chakwal city.²² According to the block wise provisional summary results of the 6th population and housing census 2017, Dhurnal has a population of 14,015 and 2,601 houses.²³ In General Elections-2018 only 21 out of 5,501 registered women voters in Dhurnal used their right to vote.²⁴ According to Potohar Organization for Development Advocacy (PODA) Punjab Local Government Elections 2015 Election Observation Report, in local government elections 2015 not a single woman in Dhurnal used their right to vote. The area has two government high schools for boys and one for girls. It also has separate degree colleges for boys and girls. The literacy rate especially among women is higher in Dhurnal than in most other villages across Punjab.²⁵ Fifteen (15) women were interviewed in

²² <https://www.dawn.com/news/1218671>

²³ <http://www.pbscensus.gov.pk/content/block-wise-provisional-summary-results-6th-population-housing-census-2017-january-03-2018>

²⁴ <http://spearheadresearch.org/?p=34904>

²⁵ <https://herald.dawn.com/news/1154065>

Dhurnal to investigate the reasons of barring women to vote. Following are results of research:

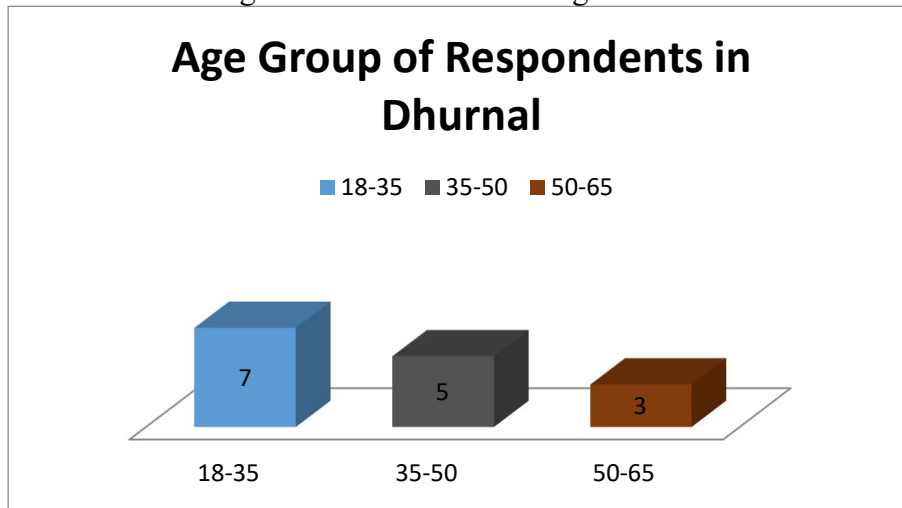


Figure 1 Age Group of Respondents-Dhurnal, Chakwal

i. Gender Biasness in Women Political Participation/Cultural Issues:

Elections are essential to democracy and development but if a large percentage of the population particularly women is excluded the process lacks credibility. Historically the people of Dhurnal consider that men can only vote and women are not allowed to vote. The women of Dhurnal are barred from casting vote for last 60 years and the reason behind the ban is that the people of the village are in view that women are not wise enough and have no right to elect a person who would rule them and the only men are authorized to fulfill this responsibility.²⁶ During the semi-structured interview one respondent shared that in General Election-2018 one men who was contesting the election said that he even prefer to lose if women would vote for him as men can only decide who is their representative. The village has a semi-feudal culture and only men can decide if women can go outside the home or not. 11 out of 15 respondents shared that women cannot decide on their own about their voting rights and the men can only decide and grant permission to women to vote. The interviewees shared that the decision to bar women from voting was taken just before a general election in 1962. As there had been dispute at community level just before the elections in 1962, that led deaths of many people and the women were seen at the core of all that violence. Afterwards the local elders decided to keep the women away from the electoral process. From 1962 to 2017 not a single woman used their right to vote and in General Elections-2018 only 14 women used their right to vote in the political history of the village.

Interesting factor in gender dimension is that girls are not prohibited to go to schools or colleges as most the girls are literate and this is the only political participation where women and girls are not permitted to use their right to vote. All interviewees shared that community has no problem sending their girls to school for education but when it comes to vote, the women and girls have to abide by the elders' decision. Furthermore, the interviewees shared that women themselves respect the community's decision and they are not willing to take part in electoral process. The secondary

²⁶ <http://www.aaj.tv/2018/07/women-of-dhurnal-chakwal-cast-vote-after-five-decades/>

data also verify the gender biasness as low women political participation. NCSW in (2010) issued gender review of political framework for women political participation and described the issue as Pakistan has male-dominated political culture. Women as registered voters are also not taken seriously by the state institutions, including political parties. The patriarchal tribal values and customary practices also restrict women registration as voters and to take part in electoral or democratic process considering politics as the domain of men.

ii. Religious Interpretations to Bar Women to Vote:

The root-cause of barring women to vote is community elder's decision in 1960 where the community collectively offered Dua-e-Khair (collective prayer and endorsement from all community members that no one will violate the decision). The violator will have to face the social and religious boycott. The fear of social and religious boycott keeps the communities away from permitting women to use their right to vote. 5 out of 15 interviewees were in of the view that religion does not allow women to go out of their home and they cannot go against the will of their men to take part in voting. To justify the 1960's decision to bar women to vote, community has now found many religious dimensions. Due to rigid local ban even election candidates do not expect votes from women and there has been un-written agreement or understanding among candidates of different political parties that women would not vote them in elections. One of the interviewees consider a sin if women take part in electoral process or go to vote without permission of men. Almost all of the interviewees shared that they would not prefer to go against the community decision (Dua-e-Khair). In conventional Islam there is equality between men and women. Islamic rules are often misinterpreted by the religious leaders and demonstrate biased against women particularly in free mobilization of women and decision making at different spheres of life.

Umer Shumaila and Othman Zaheruddin conducted a research study in 2016 on socio-cultural obstacles to women's participation in politics, in rural areas of Balochistan and the study revealed the same findings to use of religion interpretation to bat the women to vote. The research study results showed that in some part of rural Balochistan the religious party is active and most of the communities are followers of that religious party so all political parties decided mutually that they will not allow women to vote. In a result even polling station are not established in some parts of the rural Balochistan. The religious political party thinks that women political participation is unethical and unreligious because any women who want to join politics, they have to come out from their homes which is against Islamic laws.²⁷ The religious interpretation is used in many areas to bar the women right to vote. Researchers suggest that the countries with dominant religions have low participation of women in politics such is case of Pakistan.

iii. Administrative Issues that Restricts Women Political Participation:

The interviewees revealed that men are not comfortable to send women to mixed polling stations, historically there was no separate polling station for women. Furthermore, large number of men present in the streets and outside the polling stations on polling day so women prefer to keep in their homes in order to avoid any dispute or violence. The huge gender disparity also reflects in Dhurnal, due to lack of pre-requisite documentations and lack of sensitization a lot of women are

²⁷ https://ijbssnet.com/journals/Vol_7_No_10_October_2016/15.pdf

not registered in electoral lists. However, the issue is that the women who are registered in electoral lists even cannot use their right to vote. Distance of home from polling station in another hurdle for women to poll their vote, however in General Elections-2018, Election Commission highlighted their issue and establish separate polling station for women, even than only 14 women came out to vote.

iv. Lack of Voter Education and Sensitization:

One of the interviewees shared that her single vote has no value and if her vote can avoid any community dispute, she is ready to not go for vote. This kind of understanding also reflected from other interviewees. The community prefers to respect the elder's decision for unity of all segments of the village. The community had lack of awareness about citizenship rights, women constitutional rights and importance of vote. None of the interviewee knew the Election Commission's requirement of at least 10 percent women voter turnout in each constituency. The interviewees were not fully convinced about voting right of women or the voting of women can make any difference. Regarding voter education a local organization PODA and Election Commission have worked in the village and sensitized the communities about women right to vote however a lot more needs to be done. 7 out of 15 women interviewees used their right to vote in their lives.

Conclusion:

The empirical research suggests that the higher literacy rate leads to increase in women political participation both as a voter and a candidate. According to Alif Ailan district education ranking report 2017, Chakwal is 6th most literate district of Punjab²⁸ but still there is a village where women are barred to vote. On the other hand, Chakwal remained the highest women voter turnout district as compare to men in General Election-2018²⁹ but in the same district in Dhurnal only 14 women used their right to vote. The research findings suggests that sometime literacy rate play a little role in ensuring women right to vote. There are many highly educated girls and women in Dhurnal who are bound to stay in their homes and obey the elders' decision of barring women to vote. There has always been respect of Dua-e-Khair or community collective decision in rural Punjab and the community avoid breaking such decisions. The fear of social boycott or community disputes on polling day due to women votes, the community at do not let the women to come out for a vote. However, in General Elections 2018, about 14 women used their right to vote, creates hope for other women that they will also able to poll their votes in coming elections. It is very hard to judge in Dhurnal, whether the men are barring women to vote or women themselves are not so much mobilize to come out for vote. This thin line is very difficult to understand because when you will start talking to women to investigate their low political participation, after a certain point they will start sharing that they themselves do not want to take part in electoral process. The Election Commission's 10 percent rule only applies at constituency level and if this rule applies at the union council level can change the situation of women political participation at Dhurnal. Regional Manager, PODA who has extensive experience working with women in Dhurnal revealed that educated women of Dhurnal such as doctors, teachers etc do not vote and only the families who have shifted from Dhurnal and settled in cities are using their right to vote.

²⁸ <https://elections.alifailaan.pk/rankings/>

²⁹ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1788276/1-women-chakwal-make-hi/>

II. Dholar, District Chakwal

Dholar is a union council of District Chakwal in the Punjab Province of Pakistan and it is part of Tehsil Talagang of Chakwal. According to the block wise provisional summary results of the 6th population and housing census 2017, Dholar has a population of 8,117 and 1,561 houses.³⁰ There are 4,534 registered women voters in Dholar and women are barred to vote since 1977.³¹ According to Election Commission of Pakistan, not single women polled her vote in Dholar in local government elections 2015. According to PODA Election Observation Report 2018, about 1397 women from Union Council Dholar used their right to vote first time in their lives, so the women voter turnout remained 30.80 percent. Earlier the women voter turnout remained 0 in Dholar. Fifteen (15) women were interviewed in Dholar to investigate the reasons of barring women to vote. Following are results of research:

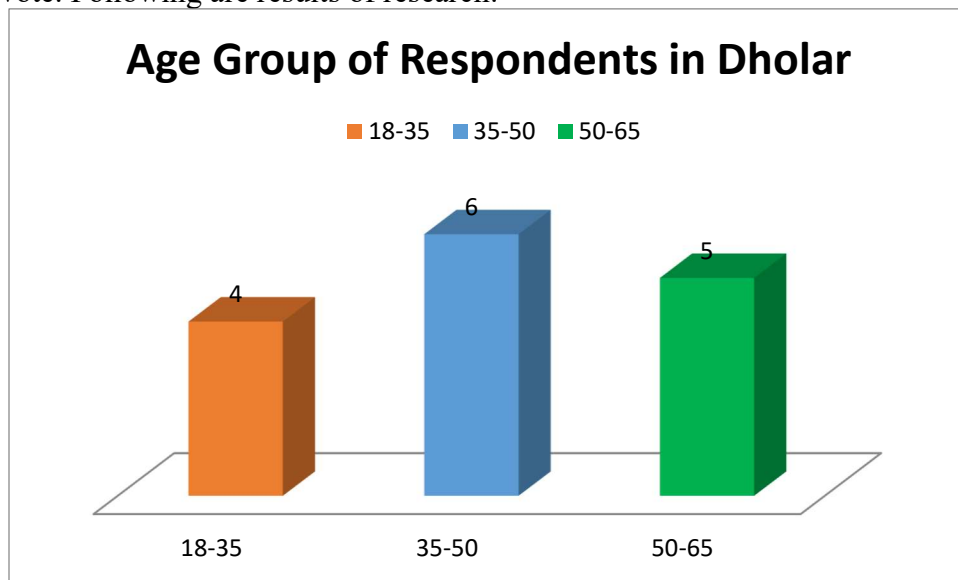


Figure 2 Age Group of Respondents in Dholar

i. Male Dominated Society and Cultural Issues:

Gender bias is an accepted phenomenon in most traditional societies in rural Pakistan. Dholar has a semi-feudal culture with deep-rooted gender issues. The area is male dominated where women has very little role in decision making. From 1977 to 2017 not a single woman polled their vote until the General Elections-2018 when 30 percent of registered women voters used their right to vote first time in their lives. The interviewees were of the view that community consider men as a decision maker particularly in political affairs and only men can participate in electoral process and go out for votes. Historically the decision of barring women to vote came in to practice in elders' decision in 1977. Since then, the community own the collective decision and restrict women right to vote. The community also does not want the free mobilization of women when it

³⁰ http://www.pbscensus.gov.pk/sites/default/files/bwpsr/punjab/CHAKWAL_BLOCKWISE.pdf

³¹ <https://timesofislamabad.com/29-Jul-2018/stop-them-where-are-thy-going--how-14-women-in-dharnal-voted-to-break-50-years-old-taboo>

comes to polling day, men prefer to keep their women in their homes because a lot of men present in the village. The interviewees revealed when the community elders decided that women would not vote in 1977, initially the decision was only for the women of leading community families called Maliks and they have not barred the women of working castes to use their right to vote. The men belonging to the working castes later on decided that if the women of leading families cannot vote, why the women of their families should vote. The main dimension of banning the women to vote was the concept of Veil (Pardah) and women to consider as the honor (Izzat) where the women are izzat of the family and they should confine to the homes. With the passage of time the women political participation remained zero in the community under the un-written agreement. Even the candidates of political parties have not expected votes from the women in the community because they knew if they will talk the community about women vote, the men would not also vote for them.

With increase in communications and mainstream media the issue has highlighted and some local organizations started working on it. The issue has not completely resolved but many houses now permitted their women to vote. 6 out of 15 interviewees shared that they openly went out for vote in General Elections-2018 and even men helped them provided them transportations to reach the polling stations and vote. 8 out of 15 representatives shared that still, there is a lot of community pressure to restrict women to vote and still the community transformation will take time to allow women to vote. The women political participation is undesirable particularly women casting the votes.

Naz Arbab conducted a research study in (2012) on socio-cultural impediments to women political empowerment in pakhtun society and the research findings were that gender subordination is one of the main factors of low women political participation. As the research findings suggested that the gender role ideology is being used as an ideological tool to restrict women with in the private arena of home as mother and wives to keep them busy in domestic chores. This is one of the main reasons that restrict women political participation in Pakistan.³²The gender role in Pakistan is so significant in low women political participation.

ii. Distance of Polling Stations

Another dimension of barring woman to vote in 1977 was the distance of polling stations from the villages. According to 5 interviewees whose age is more than 50 shared that in 1980's and 1990's there has been long distance of polling station from the villages and men were did not preferred to take the women to the polling stations due to lack of transportation and lack of facilities in polling stations such as sitting area, latrines etc. In an area where the women mobilization had already been limited and the distance of polling station had doubled the problem and restricted women political participation. One of the interviewees shared that women used to wear Burqa (veil) when they go outside the home and once in history some men went to the polling station wearing Burqa and polled the vote on women's behalf. This was at that time when the electoral lists had no photographs and CNICs had only thumb stamps. However, when I asked the question if the Election Commission establish the polling stations near the village, would the women vote? 11 out of 15 interviewees responded that this will increase the women political participation. They also shared that the women who voted in General Elections 2018 was due to near polling stations.

³² [http://www.savap.org.pk/journals/ARInt./Vol.3\(1\)/2012\(3.1-21\).pdf](http://www.savap.org.pk/journals/ARInt./Vol.3(1)/2012(3.1-21).pdf)

iii. Lack of Voter Education and Sensitization:

The interviewees shared that there is lack of voter education in the community. The communities lack the importance of vote of women. As the women since 1977 never polled the vote so due to not participating in civic or electoral process, they are not much mobilized about importance of their vote or how their vote can make the difference. 6 out of 15 interviewees shared that women are not considering themselves as voters and they are too much busy in domestic chores that they cannot concentrate on another activity. Due to lack of participation in electoral process, women also do not feel confident or politically informed to participate in political process. The interviewees shared that two factors mainly contributed in the polling of women voters in General Elections 2018 i) Distance of polling station and voter education for women. The interviewees shared that voter education for both men and women can increase the women political participation in the area. 6 out of 15 women interviewees used their right to vote in their lives.

Conclusion:

In traditional patriarchal society of Pakistan, women are expected to be dependent on men particularly rural areas of the country such as Dhunral and Dholar. In both locations, the gender biasness remained one of the main factors of low women turnout. The women are confined to their homes and they are not allowed to take part in electoral process. The concept of women subordination also played a significant role where the women has no choice and decision powers and they cannot decide on their own about electoral participation. The role of community collective decision, Dua-e-Khair also restricts women political participation. No one in the community can take the brave step to go against the decision of community about barring women to vote. Furthermore, the women have lack of voter and civic education and they are not mobilized to take part in electoral process. Due to long time disassociation with electoral process, they are not confident and free to use their right to vote. Lastly the administrative issues also restrict women political participation in Dholar. Long distance from polling stations, lack of facilities at polling stations and no separate polling stations for women also restricts women political participation and the women are not able to use their right to vote. Despite of high literacy rate in the district the women political participation is very low in the Dholar and this is due to abovementioned factors mainly gender issues, historically barring women to vote, administrative issues and lack of voter education. However, it seems that the case of Dholar is not as complex as Dhunral and women started voting in General Elections-2018. This is anticipated after interviews and secondary data analysis that women political participation will increase in Dholar in coming years.

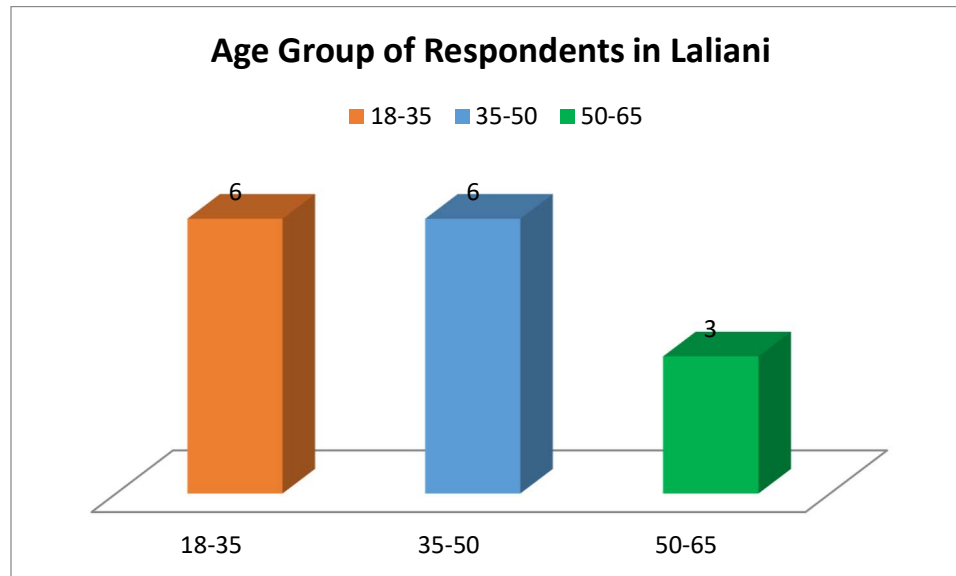
III. Laliani, Sargodha

Laliani is a union council of District Sargodha in the Punjab Province of Pakistan and it is part of Tehsil Kot Momin of Sargodha. According to the block wise provisional summary results of the 6th population and housing census 2017, Laliani has a population of 15 690 and 2567 houses. 33. According to Election Commission of Pakistan there are 1.17 million male voters and 0.931 million women in Sargodha that accounts a gender gap of 0.245 million in voter lists³⁴. According to PODA Elections Observation Report for 2018, In Union Council, Laliani, Sargodha not a single woman had polled her vote until 3:00 p.m. on the Election Day. Fifteen (15) women were

³³ http://www.pbscensus.gov.pk/sites/default/files/bwpsr/punjab/SARGODHA_BLOCKWISE.pdf

³⁴ <https://www.ecp.gov.pk/frmGenericPage.aspx?PageID=3086>

interviewed in Laliani to investigate the reasons of barring women to vote. Following are results of research:



i. Gender Biases/Cultural Barriers and Low Women Political Participation

Laliani is situated in semi-feudal area where the people have relatively large land holding. Bhakars and Sheikhs are prominent tribes in the area. The interviewees shared that historically the leading families of the area were not used to take their women to the polling stations as a local myth that courts and polling station/elections are not good places for women and the women from good families should not visit such places. 8 out of 15 interviewees shared that women's mobility is only restricted for voting, however they can freely go to school, colleges, hospitals and markets. 7 out of 15 interviewees negated that women have free mobility and shared that women and girls can only go to Madrassas for religious education and for other places such as hospitals and markets the women should have to be with men and women cannot go freely. One of the interviewees shared that the women who polled votes in General Elections 2018 belong to lower families as there is a community myth that women belonging to good families cannot go to polling staff to vote. Only a few women who are educated can go freely and without the free mobilization women's active participation in political process is not possible. One of the interviewees shared an important point that no it become the ritual that women will not poll their votes and this ritual is not as important as the other rituals of semi-feudal societies. It is very difficult to break the ritual and the rituals associated with the women or Izzat are the ridged one. Women political participation become undesirable and has been considered as like social stigma. The interviewees shared that despite of the extensive voter education campaigns by some of the civil society organizations, so far, no significant change has seen regarding women political participation. Another community myth is that community associates' elections and polling stations with fights and disputes so they prefer not to allow women to vote. The defined gender roles are also a factor of women political participation as the community perception about women is that they are only to take care of domestic chores and they have no role in politics. Due to financial dependency the women in Laliani are not empowered to decide for their political participation. Some women in Laliani still do not have CNICs and their votes are also not yet registered which also restrict their political participation. The ratio of registered voters to women population is considerably low.

Religious interpretations also restrict women political participation in the area as most of the people in the area belong to Wahabi sect of Muslims who define strict lines for women mobilization and confine them within the boundary walls of the homes and restrict their free mobilization. As the people are more religious and they tend to restrict and oppose women participating in elections and voting.

ii. Lack of Voter Education

On investigating the situation of voter education of the interviewees, two of the interviewees shared that how can the women voting make the difference and on behalf of women men can use the right to vote. As most of the women have never used the right to vote in their lives so 9 out of 15 interviewees even did not know about polling process. Furthermore, only 3 interviewees shared that vote is right of women and they should take part in electoral process. They have also shared that due to lack of voter education, women are not confident enough to participate in electoral process. Most of the women who got higher education have shifted to urban areas and cities and they are now using their right to vote. However, the women who are still staying at Laliani are semi-literate or illiterate and have lack of basic voter education. Only a few women can vote when their male counterparts allow them to vote. So, lack of voter education is also another important factor of low women political participation. Illiteracy and lack of civic education and sensitization about their rights in relation to politics hinder women's political participation.

Most of the women do not have information or lack of access to information about the electoral processes and how can they participate in electoral process. They have lack of awareness about rights and laws available that ensure women political participation. Due to largely underrepresented in decision-making positions at all levels women in Laliani has a low political and electoral participation.

iii. Polling Scheme and Political Parties as Barrier to Low Women Political Participation

There has been an unwritten agreement among the leading political parties at local level to not ask the women to vote. The political parties have significant role in mobilizing voters and they are equally responsible to prevent women from developing political skills and experiences. Some women cannot participate in the elections and use their right to vote because they do not have access to the polling stations either because the polling stations are very far away or because no transportation is available and they cannot go to the polling stations without men counterparts. If the polling station is far away from the village and home the women are dependent on their men to drop them to polling stations to use their right to vote. The presence of male polling staffs in polling stations also a hindrance in women electoral participation and significant number of men do not feel comfortable to allow their women to use their right to vote. Only 4 out of 15 women interviewees used their right to vote in their lives.

Conclusion:

The equal participation of in electoral and democratic process plays a pivotal role in women political empowerment. Without an active participation of women in elections the participation of all segments of society in electoral process remained doubtful. In Pakistan, cultural traditions segregate the population by gender and when it became the ritual that women would not poll the vote creates a lot of problems and challenges to break this ritual. Society caves religious

interpretation in favor of barring women to vote as in the case of Laliani. Generally, in Pakistan, women are dependent on men financially and their mobility is only decided by the men. In case of elections and voting, women cannot independently go out to vote. There are some commonalities and differences in three case studies of Dhurnal, Dholar and Laliani. Gender interpretation as barring women to vote is common in all three locations. Women have limited access to politics, electoral information and voting procedures due to mobility issues. In Dhurnal women and girls are only restricted to use the right to vote but they can go to school and colleges but in Laliani the mobility of women is even limited. Likewise, most of the women in Dhurnal and Dholar have CNICs and voter registration but the ratio of women voters as compared to their population is quite low and this shows the procedural hindrance in women political participation.

The main historical root-cause of barring women to vote is different in all three locations. In Dhurnal women are barred to vote due to Dua-e-Khair in 1962 that came in to implement after community violence. In Dholar the decision of barring women to vote was due to community's elders' decision in 1977 and initially it was only for the women of leading families called "Maliks" later on it become the ritual for all women in Dholar. In Laliani, barring women to vote was only for women of leading families such as Bhakkars and Sheikhs, later on it become the community ritual that women would not vote. The literacy rate in Dhurnal is much better than Dholar and Laliani. The community in Dhurnal prefers separate polling stations for women so the women can go to vote without presence of any other men. The community in Dholar prefers near and joint polling station so the men can take the women with them on polling day to vote. Religious interpretation is also a common feature in all three locations as barring women to vote, people from these communities considered women's participation in politics as un-Islamic. They confined the women within the home putting them the responsibility of domestic chores and considering politics only a matter for men.

Ensuring women right to vote, the ECP should take concrete steps in addressing those issues that are root-cause of barring women to vote. This includes mobilizing and sensitizing community elders, working with political parties so they can mobilize the communities, facilitating CNIC and voter registration, civic and voter education, educating community religious leaders and planning of comprehensive polling schemes for women so maximum women can use their right to vote.

Some leading questions of FGDs are as following:

- *Basic Information (Name, Age, Educational Qualification)*
- *Do you have CNIC and voter registration?*
- *Have you ever used the right to vote?*
- *Can you vote freely or have there any obstacles to vote?*
- *What are the reasons that women voter turnout remained significantly low in your area?*
- *What are the reasons that man can vote and their voter turnout remained better as compared to women voters?*
- *Can women independently decide whether to vote or not?*
- *Does religion play any role in your area in women political participation?*
- *Can women right to vote make any difference? What is the significance of women right to vote?*
- *What are the processes to poll the vote?*

- *What are the recommendations to ensure women right vote?*

IV. Civil Society Analysis on Women Political Participation

Five (5) civil society experts who have extensive experience working on women political participation were interviewed to understand issues of low women political participation in Dhunral, Dholar and Laliani. The semi-structured interview methodology was used to gather the data. Following are the findings of the interviews:

- The main factor of low women political participation highlighted by the interviewees was huge gender gap in electoral lists. Due to lack of accessibility to NADRA and ECP, the women have lack of civil documentations particularly CNICs and voter registration that in result restricts the women political participation. The NADRA centers and Election Commission offices are situated far away from rural areas so women cannot go there to obtain their CNICs and voter registration. The first step in ensuring women political participation is 100 percent registration of women in electoral lists and comprehensive and holistic approach is required in this regard. All other factors of women political participation come after this basic factor. NADRA centers are situated at district or tehsil level and it is difficult for women to travel to NADRA to get CNIC so the system should be established where women can get their CNICs at their door steps. The issue of low women turnout is a cultural phenomenon particularly in a rural area of Pakistan and a woman voting is a matter of honor in the areas where according to people allowing women for voting is against the cultural norms.
- The second factor highlighted by the interviewees was gender discrimination and patriarchal society. The low participation of women in decision making and pre-defined gender roles where women are only confined to homes looking after the domestic chores restricts the women political participation. Restrictions in women mobility is another key hindrance in their political participation. The women and girls in rural areas cannot go outside the home without the men. The free mobility is very much necessary in ensuring women political participation. It will take time to address the gender related issues by engaging women in economic activities and providing them opportunities to pursue for economic activities. The more women will economic empowered the more she has political participation.
- The third factor highlighted by the experts was religious interpretations to bar the women to vote. In rural areas the religious interpretation is against women political participation and it is considered that mingling of women with men and going outside the home and to vote is un-Islamic and against the preaching's of Islam. When barring women to vote become the society ritual with some religious interpretation, it become difficult to break this ritual. Religious practices are used as powerful instruments of stereotype against women political participation. Furthermore, the Purdah (Veil) issue that is associated with the women also restricts women political participation.
- The fourth factor revealed by the respondents is the literacy rate. It was shared that the women who are literate tend to participate in electoral process. As they know the importance of vote, voting process and their mobility is more as compared to illiterate

women. In Pakistan, the literacy rate of women is quite low particularly in rural areas of Pakistan. Literacy rate is positively associated with the women voter turnout. The literacy rate positively contributes in civil documentation, voter and civic education and can use the right to vote. Empirical researches suggest that literate women are more economically, socially and politically empowered.

- The fifth factor shared by interviewees was lack of civic and political education. The women in rural areas have lack of education about voting procedures, importance of vote and polling process. This leads to decrease their interest in electoral process. The women who are more politically educated tend to participate more in electoral process. The civic and voter education should be extended to wider communities including men so they should also know that vote is a woman constitutional right.

Conclusion

Pakistan has a patriarchal society and the rights of women have denied since the inception of the nation. Women's political and electoral has remained minimal irrespective of the fact that women constitute about half of the country's population. Despite of constitutional provisions of ensuring women equal participation in all walks of life, the women political participation is significantly low in Pakistan. There is a strong correlation between the status of women and their role in political participation. Pakistan is the second worst country in the world in terms of gender parity, ranking 148 out of 149 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index 2018.³⁵ This shows the overall gender situation of Pakistan. In Pakistan according to 6th Population and Housing Census 2017, women constitute about 49 percent of the total population³⁶ and in electoral lists there is a gender gap of over 12 million women voters³⁷. In registered women voters, women voter turnout in the 2018 General Elections remained 40 percent with 21 of 46 million registered women voters participating in polling³⁸. The numbers of women voters in Pakistan have been increasing with the passage of time. There are more than 42 million women registered in the electoral list that accounts 44 percent of the total registered voters.³⁹

The primary and secondary data shows that there are a lot of issues and hindrances in women political participation. Due to set gender roles, the women have lack of opportunities performing in labor markets and politics. They have lack of opportunities in getting education. According to the Pakistan Economic Survey, 2017-2018, Pakistan's overall literacy rate is 58 percent with literacy rate of men 70 percent and 48 percent of women⁴⁰. The literacy rate for women and girls living in rural areas of Pakistan is even lower than 48 percent. Due to low literacy rate the women political participation remains low.

³⁵ <https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-global-gender-gap-report-2018>

³⁶ <http://www.pbscensus.gov.pk/>

³⁷ <https://www.news18.com/news/buzz/despite-increase-in-women-voters-gender-gap-in-pakistans-political-sphere-remains-1829777.html>

³⁸ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1800497/1-beyond-women-voter-turnout-elections/>

³⁹ <http://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20eseasia/docs/publications/2018/08/status-of-the-rural-women-in-pakistan-report.pdf?la=en&vs=3739>

⁴⁰ http://www.finance.gov.pk/survey_1617.html

The society in Pakistan is influenced by cultural and social norms and people value the social ritual. The women are living in subordination role and they are being discriminated on the basis of gender. Men do not accept equal role of women in different spheres of life. In politics, this is an un-written understanding that men decide the role of women in politics and men provide very little space to women to participate in electoral process. Generally, women in rural areas are dependent on men in all steps of their political participation. If they have to get CNIC they cannot go without men, even to pay the fee of CNIC they are dependent on men, to register themselves in voter lists, they cannot go alone to ECP office, on polling day they cannot decide themselves whether to vote or not? Where are polling stations and they are again dependent on men to bring them to the polling stations to use their vote. Even the women who use their right to vote cannot vote independently according to their own wish.

Empirically research suggests that the economically empowered women tend to participate actively in electoral participation. The labor force participation of women is low and they are engaged in unpaid work. Due to dependency on men in economic affairs, they cannot participate in decision making process even at domestic level. The findings of my research on Dhunral, Dholar and Laliani suggest that the women who are engaged in jobs or economically independent can decide about voting. Furthermore, economically empowered women have civil documentations that are pre-requisite of using the right to vote. Finally, the women who are economically empowered have no mobility issues and tend to participate more in electoral and political process. Women in Pakistan are confined in homes and only engage in domestic chores. They are also engaged in the informal economy doing work unpaid at home under a highly exploitative manner. The wrong depiction restricts their political participation.

On the other hand, women's political representation and participation is improving with the passage of time and the state has also introduced some progressive legislation to ensure women political participation such as 10 percent women voter turnout in each constituency, women quota in parliament and efforts for registration of women in electoral lists. More women used their right to vote in 2018 elections as compared to 2008 and 2013 elections. The cases of barring women to vote have decreased with the passage of time. However, still a lot more needs to be done in filling the gender gap in electoral lists so all eligible women voters can use their right vote, addressing the challenges that hinder women political participation particularly targeting those areas where women are barred to vote such as Dhunral, Dholar and Laliani. ECP has a critical role in addressing these issues and bringing all relevant stakeholders such as communities, community elders, community activists, religious leaders and civil society together to ensure equal and full women political participation. Furthermore, politics is a continuous process and this process of engaging communities should start years before the elections as most of the time issue of barring women highlights just in election days cannot make the huge difference.

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