

Role Of Higher Education in Promoting Socio-Political Participation of Women in District Peshawar

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Abstract: This research paper aimed to analyze the role of higher education in improving Socio-political participation of women in District Peshawar. Generally, in Khyber and particularly in District Peshawar; socio-political participation of women is considered to be among the major issues. The need for increase in socio-political participation for women is more important because socio-political participation stands for their active and inevitable involvement in the affairs of society as well as politics which enables women to improve their life standards and produce leadership qualities among them. Furthermore, socio-political participation works as a tool and is an ultimate object which helps women in terms of empowerment and to ensure gender equality in the society. The responsible factors for low socio-political participation of women are; lack of awareness programs, lack of opportunities in higher education and lack of motivational leadership programs which are usually designed to produce women leaders. The scholar used qualitative research methodology. This study recommended various steps in order to minimize the low socio-political participation of women in District Peshawar.

Key Words: Socio-political participation, higher education, socio-economic independency, social awareness, leadership, women empowerment.

INTRODUCTION

Socio-political participation is conceptualized in many theoretical frameworks such as socio-political development theory (SDP) and critical consciousness (CC). Both these frameworks share the basics through identifying one's ability to critically analyze the social change and the actions they engage in. But due to many socio-cultural and other issues, individuals marginalized socially or economically experience socio political barriers such as social exclusion and limited access to opportunities. These experiences may shape how the marginalized youth especially the women think about social justice and can take actions for the redressal of their issues. Engagement of women in socio political activities has promise for creating social change and ensuring the progress, development and economic prosperity of their own future as well. Socio-political participation at individual as well as collective action to facilitate the change emphasized reforms to create social equality and equal opportunities for women, (Marchand, et al., 2021). Socio-political participation means the active participation in social and political issues. Thus, socio-political participation stands for the active and inevitable involvement of the individuals as well as groups in social and political context. These are the integral aspects of any civic engagement and it can define their role in the decision making process as well. Political participation itself is an ultimate object of ruling people's lives and it enables the members of the society to address the issues in a more efficient way (Balling & Karam, 2005).

Furthermore, Lamprianou defines the role of women political participation as a tool for "Political engagement or public involvement in decision making". In the same way, many other scholars and researchers had the opinion that the actual political participation concept is made up of a series of activities that influence political authority or power. In the above-mentioned scenario, it seems that it is a dynamic in nature and is characterized by the evolving social phenomenon. Participation will therefore be influencing many other factors too which are also considerable in this regard. Therefore, the concept of participation can be further influenced by many key factors. Among these factors, education is the major factor as it is a tool mostly used for a positive change in behaviors (Lamprianou & Iasonas, 2013).

On the basis of the socio economic and cultural positions of women, societies have different approaches towards women's participation in general. In all these, education is the only commonly used key factor to assess the woman's position. In modern literature, the position of women regarding leadership and active participation has improved comparatively to that of the past but still needs more reforms. Income is an important factor in social and political values as income is a relevant predictor of social and political change, gender equality and voting. As opposed to income, education for women is more appropriate in terms of freedom of expression and choice, voting, socio-political participation and gender equality. Furthermore, socio-cultural background is a definite variable in self-expressive values. Overall, the association

of education and income of women remained significant to a certain extent and social values differ strongly across classes. There is strong relation between socio-economic and socio-political values of working women which resultantly they have achieved through higher education, therefore, in socio political participation of women, education has a great impact (Zafar, 2019).

Research Objectives

To examine the role of higher education in improving socio-political participation of women in District Peshawar

Research Questions

What is the role of higher education in the context of socio-political participation of women in District Peshawar?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research is qualitative in nature, it is a kind of social science research where data was collected and researcher worked with non-numerical data seeks to interpret meanings from data that will help in understanding social life through the study of targeted population in this research to explore the Socio-political engagement of women and role of higher education. This is less structured and flexible in description. It focused on words rather than numbers and it observed the world in its natural setting through interpreting situations to understand the meanings that people make from day-to-day life. For this study, secondary sources were utilised and thematic analysis has applied as data analysis technique.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The role of women in political participation worked as a tool to engage them in the local affairs of the society to gain their view point and enable them to become strong decision makers. Education as a key factor plays its vital role to reproduce positive and fruitful results in terms of the active participation in all spheres of life. For the gender mainstreaming, education always plays its motivational powerful role to bring positive change in the behaviors (Lamprianou & Iasonas, 2013).

Across the globe, social change movements played a vital role and are an important component of functioning democratic societies as effective social change. Role of higher education in this regard is very pivotal and clear. It is the key element in the national development process and it includes the advancement of women as a focused group to bring positive change and development. As stated by Usha and Sharma in 2001, higher education is helping in two different ways. Firstly, higher education enables women leaders or change makers to become role model

for the young generation. Secondly, women are playing an important role in the growth of the society as a whole because of their understanding and knowledge about socio-political participation (Porter, 2016).

In Pakistan, women political participation can be seen in many scenarios and has involved many factors such as Pakistan Legal Commitment to the International Community which includes, "The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and International Covenant on Civic and Political Rights (ICCPR). Despite many commitments related to gender equality and women empowerment both at national as well as international level, Pakistan could not achieve its targets so far may be due to lack of women political participation in parliament. Moreover, the socio-cultural values of patriarchal society of Pakistan consider women as inferior to men. In all these circumstances, women have less opportunities to participate in social as well as political activities and their participation is still very low although the emergence of social media awareness and education has changed the position from the past and it is comparatively getting better now (Awan, 2016).

According to the researchers, higher education as formal education has a deeper impact directly as well as in-direct on women political engagements as an awareness tool. Its most visible consequence is the learning of communication skills to play an active role in leadership positions and public gatherings. The benefits of education in different places have indirect effects as these arenas provide youth with several skills to make them confident enough to address several challenges they face in their life. Students learn the skill of voluntary participation which enables them to become future leaders in their respective community or area where they live. Therefore, education can be considered a vital tool in women's socio-political participation and empowerment to address different challenges they face in their daily life (Khan, Jawad, Sarir, & Shafi, 2021).

Moreover, since decades, education has been regarded as the major element which plays a pivotal role in creating awareness among women. It not only provides skills and knowledge, as well it empowers women to take appropriate and well deserved positions in the society where she lives. Education impacts women's lives in a very efficient manner and it gives status and confidence in decision making as well. So, the impact of education in women empowerment or women socio-political participation is very vital and it is indeed the basic factor responsible for developing a bold courageous women leader who can further educate society about their basic needs and rights very efficiently. It highly impacts women's lives to acquire skills and knowledge

regarding their rights and duties as equal citizens of the state. Therefore, women socio-political participation is the fundamental element to address the gender related gaps through education, a tool to create awareness in any society. Furthermore, it is very helpful in addressing and sustainable development as a whole. Education on longer runs; it helps women to be involved directly in related decision making and public opinion. It is a solid means to ensure better accountability to women regardless of any regional discrimination. Socio-political participation further describes the differences between groups related to their beliefs, social class etc. As concept of political accountability of women emerged, it has completely changed women's lives and many women participated in decision making positions in different areas of Pakistan. Gender-sensitive governance positively affected the women's lives regarding promotion of gender equality in public policy perspectives and ensured their implementation (Chuadhry, Mutalib, & syakiran, 2019).

Higher education is the aggregate of knowledge and skills that allows theoretical as well as practical problems through training, creative development, culture, science and technology. The term higher education is also applied to high skilled experts who further contribute to the development process in multiple fields and directions. So far, its impact on women empowerment is concerned, enabling those to choose their own destiny; right to vote, job or anything in life they want to do or they think is good for them. To make them more empowered as per American Oxford dictionary which defines women empowerment is a tool to make someone stronger and more confident in controlling their lives and claiming their rights. More importantly, in south Asia, its meanings are little different; here focus is on opportunities and services rather than political power (Sharma & Afroz, 2014).

Education plays a very crucial role in developing a nation and the literacy rate of women has visibly impacted the overall socio-economic and brought visible improvement in poverty reduction. Regarding women political participation and its importance in the modern world, the ex-UN Women Director Michelle Bachelet has the opinion that "those countries where more women are in parliament, tend to have more powerful and equitable laws to address social problems as it benefits the women, children and whole family". In the recent past, dramatic increase has been noted in social movements around the world and is regarded as legitimate actors. They are regarded as legitimate actors which operate outside of the conventional political channels or sources (Rehman I. U., 2014).

Although there is a space for promotion of education as a tool for progressive change in society, the condition of

women's education deserves encouragement from all sectors and quarters. No doubt, it is a fact that education has played a very crucial role in nation building and creating awareness among the individuals of the society for decades and it is considered to be the key factor in the development of any nation. Role of women in any society is directly interlinked with education. Historically, all over the world moments raised in the past were to reduce illiteracy around the globe. All movements improving the status of women have been emphasized upon the key role of education as a significant instrument to improve women's position in that particular society (Murtaza, 2012).

Analysis and interpretation of data

Education itself plays a very significant role in the developmental process of a country. It also works as a tool to create awareness among the people about their socio-political rights and their role for the welfare of the community. In this regard, the higher education particularly, participate a lot because the higher education, not only enable women to have knowledge about their constitutional rights but as well, it motivate the females towards becoming leader to participate and contribute towards the welfare of their community because in the wake of globalization, it is very necessary for women not only to be aware of their rights but as well they should play their active role as leader for the development of the country. Thus, higher education impacted a lot of the lives of women in terms of their socio-political participation which is indeed the need of the day. However, due to some traditional cultural norms especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, women participation is low (Sumera & Mehmood, 2018).

The role of higher education in the age of globalization

Since the last few decades, globalization has also had a greater impact on women's lives across the globe. These new trends helped a lot of women in all domains i.e., social, political, economics, recreational and cultural aspects. Though, in the wake of globalization, women got a lot of empowerment and other opportunities related to their rights but still in underdeveloped countries, they remained deprived in many spheres of life including their access to education, employment opportunities; health care facilities and basic human rights. However, on the other hand, in developed countries, globalization brought much improvement in women's lives through increasing the provision of education, especially higher education, which was the significant development of the globalization era. Now, women are comparatively more aware and empowered in socio-political context. They are more concerned about their life, health and safety through the provision of increasing opportunities in the higher education sector with the help of Government as well as international organizations which are primarily focusing on

women education, gender equality and provision of basic health services as a global initiative. Thus, the relationship of globalization and women's empowerment is not simply linear, there is a positive correlation between globalization, media, educational attainment and economic productivity, exercise of social and political responsibility and the authority to uphold the respect of individual and groups' rights (Mahsud & Ali, 2020).

Socio-cultural norms

It is a fact that socio-cultural norms play a very important role in women participation in leadership programs and they define boundaries for them. Socio-cultural norms play a very significant role in an individual's life to utilize their skills and hidden potentials. Similarly, due to these socio-cultural barriers, women seldom play their role as active members of the society. The case of women participation in politics is also similar and their participation is decreasing due to several factors which includes, lack of coordination between male and female MPs and other public organizations, lack of party support, the dominance of male dominated structures and norms which works as strong force against women active political participation, inefficient media mobilization, lack of leadership oriented trainings and education at larger level and lack of quota reservations for women (Balling & Karam, 2005).

Furthermore, the indigenous culture of Pakistan also puts taboos on females in the form of family behaviors. The structurally enforced inferior status of women in society badly affects their leadership skills and restricts their career growth in this way. These cultural barriers strongly affect women's leadership skills (Manzoor, 2015). Addition to that, religious extremism may additionally undermine and underestimate the women in society and try to stop the women's voices about their rights though political and legal structures tend to protect the status quo, upholding the barriers the young girls and women face. These structures trying to enable women to address all such issues remained the goal of several international projects to address gender discrimination and to promote gender equality. Spread of higher education and awareness can unlock the hidden potential of women as drivers of change because when women participate in the socio-political sphere, they become more confident to bring positive change both in their own lives and in the community from which they belong. Political participation is not limited to the action of voting and active participation as a candidate, rather it is a responsible factor which tends to bring positivity to all areas of life and all sectors of the society (Plan International Germany, 2018).

Mostly, it has been considered that the socio-political participation of women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province is low mainly due to the strict socio-cultural norms and lack of awareness about the rights and duties. In this way, it has been deeply tied with the socio-cultural norms of Pashtun society (Pashtunwali). Pashtunwali, is an unwritten law, socio political culture and an ideology which is inherited by the *Pashtuns* from their ancestors and being carried out in the same way from generation to generation as a dominant force. The socio-cultural status of women has been defined by this stereotype mindset and is due to rigid religious misinterpretations of women rights by few less educated people. These all together are the strong force and hurdle in women socio-political participation. These ideas and stereotyping thinking arising from the misinterpretation of religious values were found to be meaningful in shaping the attitude of the male community members about the women's socio-political participation. Moreover, compared to the rural areas, these so-called traditions and restrictions are not practiced so seriously in urban and plain areas where spread of awareness through education has changed the mindset of the people. Therefore, it is evident that the impact of learning and awareness has greatly influenced the mindset of people in general. With the spread of education and exposure at national as well as international level, the attitude of people has been completely changed now and they positively advocate the women's active participation in all spheres of life where necessary. Consequently, the women from elite class educated backgrounds are mostly the right activists, politicians and strong advocates of not only their own rights but as well they are raising voices and participating for the development of the community. Moreover, due to the impact factor of higher education and awareness about the legal and basic rights, the women in urban areas are comparatively more actively participating in socio-political context than that of rural women. The rural women, in comparison, are disproportionately underrepresented not only in leadership positions in socio-political context but as well in some cases, they are not aware about their basic human rights and as a result, they are confined to home and their participation is very low. Due to these issues, in urban areas, the concept of women socio-political participation is totally changed from that of rural areas because in rural areas, the traditional mindset is more influential and women are supposed to strictly follow the *Pashtun* cultural values where they are supposed to sit behind the four walls of the house to look after the family instead of being the advocate of women rights and issues. Whereas in urban areas, due to the impact of higher education, the situation is comparatively better and women are not only aware about their rights and duties as well, the girls of highly educated elite class are playing their active role in the country's development (Jamal, 2014).

Women's role in social and political activities remained numerous and highly valuable. Although in the present education system of the political government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, there are more educational opportunities for women, cultural attitudes towards women education need reforms and change; only in this way real targets can be achieved at long term plans and goals as per global SDGs standards. Therefore, the overall educational system for women remained slow in process due to these obstacles and cultural attitudes and for improvement, positive change is vital (Porter, 2016).

The main causes which are creating hurdles in women socio-political participation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are identified as; low literacy rate, and its impact on women education, lack of socio-political education, lack of opportunities for women in higher education, lack of knowledge about the constitutional role of women and knowledge about their legal rights (Rehman G. S., 2015).

To address these challenges in a country like Pakistan, it is very important to make full use of talent regardless of gender discrimination at all. In Pakistan, cultural norms and strong values define a woman's position in that particular society although the overall impact of patriarchal structure is not uniform and it varies from area to area but generally, Pakistan has a patriarchal society where gender inequality prevails in the society. Mostly the male members of the society are holding prominent and dominant power positions in the mainstream. According to a report by UNICEF in 2006, Pakistan has wider gender discrimination in all South Asia. For sustainable development, it is very necessary to increase opportunities for women and minimize gender gaps. As mentioned earlier, education can play a major role to reshape their lives and directions towards prosperous life. Although economic independence is the major key toward women's active social participation and empowerment, it can be only achieved through education (Malik & Courtney, 2012).

Through the provision and improvement in higher education system socio-political awareness, it can be improved. The improvement in active socio-political participation of women can also increase the development in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the women could have participate in socio-political development of the country in more reform ways because participation of women in socio-political context is very important and it is one of the strong reasons for the progress of developed countries that they have given women the equal opportunities of participation as the developed nations around the globe pay equal attention to male and female higher education, however, in developing countries as contrast to developed countries, the female sector is highly

neglected and same is true to Pakistan (Sumera & Mehmood, 2018).

Socio political participation of women is highly linked with the provision of higher education

After decades of political science research showed that an individual's tendency to participate in the political process is directly influenced by education. Education is a strong predictor of this participation. Many studies concluded that education in the regression model is assuming a linear additive relationship (Hillygus, 2005).

Education improves a lot the common sense of an individual along with improvement in critical and rational thinking; general knowledge and understanding; living standards and financial status. Because women are considered to be more responsible for the upbringing of the future generation, therefore, the need for higher education for them is more but still in many parts of Pakistan, women are deprived of it. For example, in District Peshawar, due to social and cultural and other barriers, women's higher education ratio is low. Mainly it is due to the family permission, financial status of individuals (as in some cases, they cannot afford to get higher education) and security conditions. However, through the increase in enrollment of women and provision of a safe and secure environment the problem can be sorted out. In this regard, the government should pay extra attention and should make some additional efforts to address the issue (Faizi & Butt, 2017).

Education is the key element in social-political participation and it is directly linked with political participation. With education people in general feel more engaged and integrated into society and integration in return allows for people to "speak up" about issues or conditions which may affect them or people around them. Another element of education is that in more developed countries, or even in developing countries, education is key to stability also in terms of employment. Education thus allows for a higher socio-economic status, which in return provides for greater participation in the socio-political realm.

Findings

► Uneducated or less educated families are not allowing their female family members to participate in the name of so-called socio-cultural barriers imposed on them due to lack of education and understanding about women's rights and their role in society.

► Lack of awareness about their role and rights as per the Constitutional framework is also the main hurdle because usually, the women are unaware about their legal and basic human rights.

► Due to lack of Trainings and leadership programs for women particularly, the socio-political participation is low in Peshawar because such kind of training programs boost up the passion not only to be well are member of the society as well it increases the leadership abilities and motivate the women to play their role in the welfare of the community from where they belong.

► Lack of motivation and individual interests also are the responsible factors for low participation of women. Individuals will be highly responsible in learning and improving innovative ideas and attitudes towards active participation.

► Provision of opportunities towards equal education is also making the women participation low as mostly, women are not given the equal opportunities.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the data analysis, a major conclusion is drawn. This conclusion identified through the analysis has been categorized as under:

In District Peshawar, the participation of women in socio-political process is slow mainly due to lack of political education and awareness programs and less opportunities of higher education for women. Though, through several initiatives of women entrepreneurship, women are getting empowered but still in traditional families of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, mostly the males are dominating women's lives and their decision making which as a result, decreases their socio-political participation and is influencing their living standards. Based on the findings of the available data, it has been observed that most of the women in un-educated or less-educated families are not allowed to participate in the name of so-called socio-cultural barriers imposed on them due to lack of education and understanding about women 's rights and their role in society .The women in such families are not given what they actually deserve due to the lack of education and strict mind set of these traditional families. As a result, in the form of various rituals, traditions and customs, they are deprived of their legitimate rights even. In such a scenario, it is very difficult to speak about the active participation of women in the socio-political sphere. However, comparatively in urban areas as per available data, their participation has improved with the impact of higher education and globalization and they are now active participants both in socio-political context. Due to the spread of globalization and higher education across the province, the traditional role of women is now changing and they are now comparatively good in participation in the Province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa compared with that of the past. Now, women are more independent, good decision makers and are participating

in leadership programs. Due to the spread of education, no doubt, socio-political participation of women has increased but still it is very low comparatively with the Punjab.

Women belongs to educated families, are participating and contributing a lot in the socio-economic development of the country in general though several services and performing their valuable duties in this regard yet more opportunities in higher education and community awareness programs will boost it up for sure to achieve the targeted results in socio-political participation of women in District Peshawar and surroundings because the need for increase in socio political participation for women is more because the socio-political participation advocates their active and inevitable involvement in the affairs of society as well as politics which enables women to improve their life standards and produce leadership qualities among them. It works as a tool and is an ultimate object which helps women in terms of empowerment and to ensure gender equality as per standards of sustainable development goals.

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