

Perceptions of Islāmic Scholars towards Women's Political Empowerment in Pashtūn Society (A Case Study of District Mardān)

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Abstract:

The aim of this study is to provide an in-depth insight into the perception of Islāmic Scholars regarding women political empowerment in Pashtūn society that ultimately plays a big role in shaping the public opinion on grass root level that either encourages or bars women from participating in political affairs. Being an important agent of public opinion not only in religious affairs but social issues as well, beliefs and estimation of Islāmic scholars are powerful voices in shaping the narratives in communities and society including emancipation of women in the largely conservative, patriarchal and comparatively religious Pashtūn society particularly in the rural areas. The study was qualitative in nature and data was collected through in-depth interviews from respondents selected on quota sampling technique in the absence of a sampling frame. Data was collected from 30 respondents including 15 Deobandīs, 5 Islāmic studies lecturers and professors, 10 Barelvis, 2 Shiites and 3 Ahle Ḥadith Ūlemā via semi-structured in-depth interviews including 5 female Ūlemā to represent the major sects of Islām in the region. It was found that Ahle Ḥadith and Deobandīs were comparatively more conservative while academics and Shiites were the most progressive group of the sample regarding female political empowerment. It was revealed that this is a sensitive subject with no clear consensus. The most conservative Ūlemā who opposed women participation in politics cited the example of Shūrā consisting of only males to decide the Rashidun Caliphs where as the most progressive of them cited examples of equality derived from the Koran and the leadership of Aisha (the widow of Prophet Muhammad SAW) especially in rebellion against Caliph Alī. There was considerable diversity of views as well as

levels of tolerance and support for women political empowerment. While most scholars accepted the political rights of women in principle, some contested this by citing other negative social consequences of women participation in the current political set up; others thought of women emancipation as necessary for the progress of the community, society, country and humanity.

Key Words: *Women political empowerment; Pashtūn society; Pashtūn Women; Islāmic Scholars; Perception; Gender role*

Introduction and Background

Since the creation of the parliamentary form, women's political participation and representation in decision-making institutions have remained nominal regardless of the fact that women now constitute more than half of the world's population. Over time, it is becoming increasingly aware that the emergence of a gender-balanced society to address women's status issues can only be achieved by encouraging greater participation of women in decision-making and decision-making institutions. Politics in general and the legislature in particular. In different parts of the world, there are considerable variations in the political participation of women (Bari,2005).¹

The perception of the Ūlemā (Religious Scholars) regarding political empowerment of women is very important in Pakistan in general and *Khyber Pashtūnkhwā* in particular. Because Ūlemā's opinions are very influential in our society, people blindly follow these Ūlemā, whatever they are, people accept them. In this article, the researchers tried to discuss the political status of women in Pakistan and more specifically in Mardān from the Ūlemā point of view (Ahmed, 1992).²

"The status that women have achieved in the current era has not been achieved because of the kindness of men or because of natural progress," says *Dr. Jamāl A. Badāwin*. "It was rather realized by a long struggle and a sacrifice on the part of the woman and only when Society needed its contribution and its work, especially! During the two world wars, and because of the escalation of technological change "(Badāwī, 1971).³

Women in Pakistan are suppressed and forced to stay inside of their homes. If a woman wants to cast her vote, she is not allowed by her male family members. If she wants to contest election, she is considered a bad woman in the society. The term women political rights refer to autonomies and powers of women and girls of all ages in terms of politics in a state as an equal citizen. These rights may or may not be institutionalized, ignored or suppressed by law, local custom, and behavior in a particular society (Bari, 2006).⁴ These liberties are grouped together and differentiated from broader notions of human rights because they often differ from the freedoms inherently possessed by or recognized for

men and boys and because activists for this issue claim an inherent historical and traditional bias against the exercise of rights by women and girls (Hosken, 1981).⁵

Annemarie Schimmel states that "compared to the pre-Islāmic position of women, Islāmic legislation meant an enormous progress; the woman has the right, at least according to the letter of the law, to administer the wealth she has brought into the family or has earned by her own work".

According to Professor William Montgomery Watt, when seen in such historical context, Muhammad "can be seen as a figure who testified on behalf of women's rights." It was Aisha, the wife of Prophet Muhammad who led Mecca against Medina in the first civil war of the Islāmic empire signifying the improvement of the political status of women under Islām. All these rights granted by Islām gave them a lot of political rights they never had.

Objectives of the Study

1. To find out Ūlemā's view regarding women's political empowerment.
2. To find out why people, especially women, accept the misinterpretation of Islām by the sectarian Ūlemā.
3. To analyze the misconceptions regarding women empowerment through those who have progressive knowledge of Islām.

1.3 Rationale of the Study

The researcher belongs to rural Mardān and received the education from Peshawar where women are suppressed and are deprived of their rights. Researcher felt the need to conduct a research study on the issue of women's political empowerment. Many research studies have been conducted on women empowerment from different perspectives but none have analyzed perceptions of Ūlemā towards women's political empowerment. I also observed that Ūlemā are often advocates of patriarchal structure of society. I also felt the need for understanding Ūlemā's opinion because a large number of them are observed to be defending the status-quo regarding women political empowerment. Therefore, it is important to explore how Ūlemā's interpretations of women political rights are impacting women's empowerment in Mardān. As Islām has empowered women so the question arises that why our Pashtūn women are suppressed? This research study probes into the perspective of Ūlemā towards women empowerment and find out those hurdles which women are facing in our society. Thus, it is important to highlights the reasons why women in our society are facing disempowerment. This study will reveal various ways of taking Ūlemā on board to achieve women political empowerment and how to reduce their resistance if any towards women political empowerment in par with the needs of modern era.

Women empowerment in the context of Quran

Quran is the only part of Islām on which every Islāmic sect agrees as the word inspired by God's revelation to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) through the angel Gabriel. It is very interesting to see many things considered must for Muslim women are not mentioned in the Quran itself but the result of patriarchal attitudes. Some important verses are:

- i. Men and women are implied to be equal:

"فَقُلْنَا يَا آدَمُ إِنَّ هَذَا عَدُوٌّ لَكَ وَلِزَوْجِكَ فَلَا يُخْرِجَنَّكَ مِنَ الْجَنَّةِ فَتَشْقَى" ⁶

"So We said: O Adam! This is an enemy to you and to your wife; therefore let him not drive you both forth from the garden so that you should be unhappy; "

"مَنْ عَمِلَ صَالِحًا مِّن ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنْثَىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَلَنُحْيِيَنَّهٗ حَيَاةً طَيِّبَةً وَلَنَجْزِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْرَهُم بِأَحْسَنِ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ" ⁷

"Whoever does good, whether male or female, and is a believer, We shall certainly make him live a good life, and We shall certainly give them their reward for the best of what they did."-

"ضَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا لِلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا امْرَأةَ نُوحٍ وَامْرَأةَ لُوطٍ كَانَتَا تَحْتَ عَبْدَيْنِ مِنْ عِبَادِنَا صَالِحَيْنِ فَخَانَتَاهُمَا فَلَمْ يُغْنِيَا عَنْهُمَا مِنَ اللَّهِ شَيْئًا وَقِيلَ ادْخُلَا النَّارَ مَعَ الدَّاخِلِينَ" ⁸

"God sets forth an example to those who disbelieve: the wife of Noah and the wife of Lot, they were both under two of Our righteous servants, but they acted treacherously towards them so they availed them naught gainst God, and it was said: Enter both the fire with those who enter."—

- ii. It is at ease with women rulers:

"إِنِّي وَجَدْتُ امْرَأةً تَمْلِكُهُمْ وَأُوتِيَتْ مِنْ كُلِّ سَيِّئٍ وَلَهَا عَرْشٌ عَظِيمٌ" ⁹

I found (there) a woman ruling over them and provided with every requisite; and she has a magnificent throne. -

- iii. Women can carry the message of God to humans:

"وَمَرْيَمَ ابْنَتَ عِمْرَانَ الَّتِي أَحْصَنَتَ فَرجَهَا فَنفَخْنَا فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِنَا وَصَدَقَتْ بِكَلِمَاتِ رَبِّهَا وَكُتِبَ عَلَيْهَا وَكَانَتْ مِنَ الْقَانِتِينَ" ¹⁰

"Mary the daughter of Imran, who guarded her chastity; and We breathed into (her body) of Our spirit; and she testified to the truth of the words of her Lord and of His Revelations, and was one of the devout (servants). -

- iv. Men should be generous towards women:

"وَأَتُوا النِّسَاءَ صَدُقَاتِهِنَّ نِحْلَةً فَإِن طِبْنَ لَكُمْ عَن سَائِيٍّ مِّنْهُ نَفْسًا فَكُلُوهُ
هَمِيئًا مَّرِيئًا"¹¹

"And give the women [upon marriage] their [bridal] gifts graciously."

- v. Women can accumulate property:

"وَإِن أَرَدْتُمْ اسْتِبْدَالَ زَوْجٍ مَّكَانَ زَوْجٍ وَآتَيْتُمْ إِحْدَاهُنَّ قِنطَارًا فَلَا تَأْخُذُوا مِنْهُ شَيْئًا أَتَأْخُذُونَهُ بُهْتَانًا وَإِنَّمَا مُبِينًا وَكَيْفَ تَأْخُذُونَهُ وَقَدْ أَفْضَى بَعْضُكُمْ إِلَى بَعْضٍ وَأَخَذْنَ مِنْكُمْ مِّيثَاقًا غَلِيظًا".

But if you want to replace one wife with another and you have given one of them a great amount [in gifts], do not take [back] from it anything. Would you take it in injustice and manifest sin? "And how could you take it while you have gone in unto each other and they have taken from you a solemn covenant?" - Quran 4:20-21.

- vi. Wives of Muhammad are revered as mothers of the Muslims:

"النَّبِيُّ أَوْلَىٰ بِالْمُؤْمِنِينَ مِنْ أَنفُسِهِمْ وَأَزْوَاجُهُ أُمَّهَاتُهُمْ وَأُولُو الْأَرْحَامِ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلَىٰ بِبَعْضٍ فِي كِتَابِ اللَّهِ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُهَاجِرِينَ إِلَّا أَن تَفْعَلُوا إِلَىٰ أَوْلِيَائِكُمْ مَّعْرُوفًا كَانَ ذَلِكَ فِي الْكِتَابِ مَسْطُورًا".

"The Prophet is closer to the Believers than their own selves, and his wives are their mothers." – Quran 33:6.

- vii. Wives of Muhammad advised to not directly engage with guests:

"وَإِذَا سَأَلْتُمُوهُنَّ مَتَاعًا فَاسْأَلُوهُنَّ مِن وَرَاءِ حِجَابٍ"¹².

And when you ask (his wives) for anything you want, ask them from behind a screen."

Men are advised to observe chivalry and kindness towards women:

"وَعَاشِرُوهُنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ فَإِن كَرِهْتُمُوهُنَّ فَعَسَىٰ أَن تَكْرَهُوا شَيْئًا وَيَجْعَلَ اللَّهُ فِيهِ خَيْرًا كَثِيرًا"¹³.

"And live with them in kindness. For if you dislike them – perhaps you dislike a thing and Allah makes therein much good."

- viii. Muhammad's wives and daughters advised to wear their garments to be identified as to be safe harassment:

"يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ قُلْ لِأَزْوَاجِكَ وَبَنَاتِكَ وَنِسَاءِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ يُدْنِينَ عَلَيْهِنَّ مِن جَلَابِيبِهِنَّ ذَلِكَ أَدْنَىٰ أَن يُعْرَفْنَ فَلَا يُؤْذَيْنَ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَّحِيمًا"¹⁴.

"O Prophet! tell thy wives and daughters, and the believing women, that they should cast their outer

garments over their persons (when abroad): that is most convenient, that they should be known (as such) and not molested. And God is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful."

- ix. Forced marriages are forbidden:

"وَاللَّاتِي يَأْتِيَنَّ الْفَاحِشَةَ مِنْ نِسَائِكُمْ فَاَسْتَشْهِدُوا عَلَيْهِنَّ اَرْبَعَةً مِّنْكُمْ فَاِنْ شَهِدُوا فَاَمْسِكُوهُنَّ فِي الْبُيُوتِ حَتَّىٰ يَتَوَفَّاهُنَّ الْمَوْتُ اَوْ يَجْعَلَ اللَّهُ لَهُنَّ سَبِيلاً"¹⁵.

And live with them in kindness. For if you dislike them – perhaps you dislike a thing and Allah makes therein much good."

- x. Husbands should spend on wives:

"اَسْكِنُوهُنَّ مِنْ حَيْثُ سَكَنْتُمْ مِنْ وُجْدِكُمْ وَلَا تَضَارُّوهُنَّ لِيُضَيِّقُوا عَلَيْهِنَّ وَاِنْ كُنَّ اَوْلَاتٍ حَمِلٍ فَاَنْفِقُوا عَلَيْهِنَّ حَتَّىٰ يَضَعْنَ حَمْلَهُنَّ فَاِنْ اَرْضَعْنَ لَكُمْ فَاَتُوهُنَّ اُجُورَهُنَّ وَاَتَمِرُوا بَيْنَكُمْ بِمَعْرُوفٍ وَاِنْ تَعَاَسَرْتُمْ فَاَسْتَرْضِعْ لَهُ اُخْرَىٰ لِيُنْفِقَ ذُو سَعَةٍ مِّنْ سَعَتِهِ وَمَنْ قُدِرَ عَلَيْهِ رِزْقُهُ فَلْيُنْفِقْ مِمَّا آتَاهُ اللَّهُ لَا يُكَلِّفُ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا اِلَّا مَا آتَاهَا سَيَجْعَلُ اللَّهُ بَعْدَ عُسْرٍ يُسْرًا"¹⁶.

"Lodge them [in a section] of where you dwell out of your means and do not harm them in order to oppress them. And if they should be pregnant, then spend on them until they give birth. And if they breastfeed for you, then give them their payment and confer among yourselves in an acceptable way; but if you are in discord, then there may breastfeed for the father another woman." "Let a man of wealth spend from his wealth, and he whose provision is restricted – let him spend from what Allah has given him. Allah does not charge a soul except [according to] what He has given it. Allah will bring about, after hardship, ease." -

- xi. Inheritance rights:

"لِّلرِّجَالِ نَصِيبٌ مِّمَّا تَرَكَ الْوَالِدَانِ وَالْاَقْرَبُونَ وَلِلنِّسَاءِ نَصِيبٌ مِّمَّا تَرَكَ الْوَالِدَانِ وَالْاَقْرَبُونَ مِمَّا قَلَّ مِنْهُ اَوْ كَثُرَ نَصِيبًا مَّفْرُوضًا"¹⁷.

"For men is a share of what the parents and close relatives leave, and for women is a share of what the parents and close relatives leave, be it little or much – an obligatory share." -

- xii. God will hold husbands accountable for their treatment of wives:

"قَدْ سَمِعَ اللَّهُ قَوْلَ الَّتِي تُجَادِلُكَ فِي زَوْجِهَا وَتَشْتَكِي اِلَى اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ يَسْمَعُ

تَخَاوَرَكُمَا إِنَّ اللَّهَ سَمِيعٌ بَصِيرٌ".¹⁸

"God has indeed heard (and accepted) the statement of the woman who pleads with thee concerning her husband and carries her complaint (in prayer) to God: and God (always) hears the arguments between both of you: for God hears and sees (all things)." —.

Women Political Empowerment in Global Scenario

Women constitute more than half of the world's citizens but they are generally treated as second citizens if not considered as one, they are under-represented in the governments of the world whether it be in the legislative, executive, judiciary, bureaucracy or military. It is worth noting that only 60 women have succeeded in being elected as head of state and government. Women political empowerment varies internationally. Nordic countries and Pacific islands have a good reputation for women political empowerment. Women's suffrage (right to vote) is now overtly stated as a right under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, adopted by the United Nations in 1979. Let's analyze women political empowerment around the world (Jabeen, 2004).¹⁹

To achieve a vision of equality, justice, and opportunity for all is the right and smart thing to do. The full participation and involvement of women in every level of society is important for countries striving to become more open stable and self-sufficient. It has become increasingly clear around the world that investment in women pay off many-fold (Hasan & Menon, 2004).²⁰

Pakistani women political empowerment looks nice on paper, with 33% seats reserved for women in the National Assembly which has a woman as its speaker. It has voted for a female prime minister two times, the first Muslim country to do so and Pakistan women got the right to vote with its independence for which others had to struggle a lot. But the ground realities are different as *Jirgas* put restrictions on women's voting and Pakistani women are not empowered inside their household. It is a Muslim country that is not nearly as conservative as others such as Iraq or Saudi Arabia. We had a woman first run the country in 1993; America has yet to have a woman hold their highest office, President of the United States. The election of Benazir Bhutto to the country's premier post in 1993 and appointment of Dr *Shamshād Akhtar* as governor State Bank of Pakistan shows that gender in itself is not a problem for women aspiring to high office in Pakistan (Kabeer, 1999).²¹

Endeavors for women's advancement that were started at the dawn of independence resulted in certain significant gains in the last fifty years of the country's existence. The Family Laws Ordinance of 1961 for example was the first noticeable achievement in the legislative realm. Women's movement in 1980s and 1990s moved into a maturity phase and Pakistan took the major steps of signing of CEDAW in 1996(although

with the provision that all legislation would be subject to the Constitution of Pakistan) and adoption of National Plan of Action in 1998. Pakistan's government fully participated in all international conferences on women including Mexico (1975), Nairobi (1985), Copenhagen (1990) and Beijing (1995).²² The government in 2001 also signed the ILO convention 100, which stipulates equal pay for equal value of work. Pakistan is also signatory to a United Nations accord that binds the participating governments to increase women proportion in public sector employment to 50% (Hosken, 1981).

Hudood Ordinance

There were setbacks for women emancipation in 1977-1988, when the government of General Zia-ul-Haq imposed the *Shariah Laws* which marked a period of reversal in the legal rights of women. By this time there were increasing numbers of women joining the movement from the middle classes and they were analyzing the effects of the religious arguments being used to close the doors of economic and other opportunities to women.

Under the Hudood Ordinance, 1979 (concerning adultery, rape, and theft), a woman's testimony is disregarded completely, leaving male testimony the only acceptable and valid one. *The Qanoon-e- Shahadat*, or the Law of Evidence, 1984, clearly violates women's constitutional rights as equal citizens before the law, by diminishing a woman's evidence to half that of a man's and by excluding it completely in the absence of a male witness (Hassan, 1989).²³

The Military government of General Musharraf provided a progressive window of 33% reservation of seats to women at all tiers of local governance, which makes approximately 36,400 women. The Military government also reintroduced the reservation of seats for women at the Senate, National, and Provincial Assemblies level – approximately 17%. This has been possible under the legal framework order of 2002 and several laws amended at that time.

In response of the Military Government's decision on women's reserved seats the representation of women in the 2002 election changed dramatically. This affirmative step translated to increase in women's representation in the National Assembly; 13 on general and 61 on reserved seats. In the four provincial assemblies, the figure is 140, 12 on general seats and 128 on reserved seats. The total strength of 73 women in the National Assembly constituted as 21% of its composition as compared to approximately 4% in 1997 (Bari, 2008).²⁴

Devolution Plan and Women Political Empowerment

The allocation of thirty three percent seats for women in the local governments through the devolution plan the new ordinance has given the women of Pakistan their first real opportunity to enter into the realm of mainstream politics at the local and national level.

Female Party Leaders

There are five women in the history of Pakistan, i.e., Fatima Jinnah (PML), Benazir Bhutto (PPP), Nusrat Bhutto (PPP), Ghinwa Bhutto (PPP-SB), and Begum Naseem Wali Khan (ANP), who have become leaders of their parties. However, all of them inherited their political career from their husbands/fathers and later went on to become politicians in their own right.

Women Membership in Parties

At the level of the political parties, it is difficult to assess women's membership. Since all the major political parties do not maintain a proper record of their membership, the data on women as members of political parties are unclear and incomplete. However, it is observed that women's participation in political parties from the urban areas, especially in Punjab and Sindh, has increased since the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Women Wings

At present, all major political parties, especially Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP) and Awami National Party (ANP) have specified women's wings. However, the membership of women's wings is much smaller than the male membership of the party. Women's wings of the political parties usually toe the party line, promote party agendas, and do not have any visible influence on the decision-making processes and political programs of their parties. In general, women's wings are mainly utilized by the parties to mobilize womenfolk during elections, work as polling agents in women's booths, and demonstrate on behalf of the party when directed by the party's high command. The Manifestoes of some political parties to address gender issues in general way there is little reference to fulfilled participation of women per se.

Since political parties have largely viewed women's wings as tools to support their agendas, they have made no real effort to enhance the knowledge base of women in their wings or to mainstream them in political party. As a result there is often resentment or frustration among members of women's wings. Women's wings themselves have also expect in every recent year not made any efforts to educate or inform them about political issues generally or non gender issues in particular limited understanding of political or gender issued they rarely make any concrete participation in terms of ticket to reserved seats appointment as office bearers or onto some committees inclusion in delegation, or support for individual welfare ventures undertaken by only join women's wings because males are in their families are members ,rises and wanes low accordingly .The overall attitude of political parties towards women members also leads to their representation on executive bodies .Though this has increased somewhat in some political parties over recent years this has often been cosmetic and generally insufficient for women to begin to play an effective role within the decision making of the party

(Bari,2005).²⁵

Women in Khyber Pashtūkhwa face numerous sets of problems, as voters, candidates, and political activists. Pashtūn politics does not have a culture of promoting women political activism. Their biggest problems are non-registration as voters, registration under their husband's or father's name rather than their own. As a candidate their biggest hurdles are the patriarchal political structure, requirements of funds to get a party ticket and contest elections, security and independence required for canvassing, etc. unorganized women wings, lack of gender mainstreaming in leadership, and lack of internal democratic norms in political parties.

In spite of all the initiatives and international commitments signed by the government the conditions and position of women in Pashtūn society remain disadvantaged and subordinated at all levels. Economic, political and social disparities continue to persist in all spheres of public and private life. Notwithstanding the creation of Women Development Department in Khyber Pashtūkhwa there is no appreciable impact in the conditions of women in Khyber Pashtūkhwa. NPA, which has been formally adopted by Government of the Khyber Pashtūkhwa, requires women-specific actions by a whole range of provincial departments but performance of the government in this respect has not been satisfactory. Major impediments that hamper progress on the road to women's emancipation are lack of political will, exclusion of civil society input from government policy and programmed implementation structures, low financial allocations, lack of gender-related capacities and diffused focus of the current social welfare Women Development Directorate (Mernissi, 2003).²⁶

In the past, women were barely involved in the political process at any level, except for voting, almost under-represented in any political forums and invisible at the decision-making level. Most women were largely unaware of the importance of political participation and even less of how to go about it. They had neither the information nor the confidence to express their concerns and no exposure and training to achieve any success. Even today groups working toward change rarely recognize their concerns as vital. Women form a nominal percent of the membership of any party in Khyber Pukhtoonkhwa except the Awami National Party (ANP) which is still not enough. The political parties have not realized that it is to their advantage to increase women's participation at all levels including party governance at the central level.

Mardān holds the distinction in Pashtūkhwa that two female giants of Pukhtoon and Pakistani politics belong to Mardān in the shape of Begum Naseem and Begum Sarfaraz. The women of Mardān faces the same problems as mentioned above by the researchers in regard to their political empowerment. They don't have the awareness about their political empowerment. The women of Mardān face cultural as well as

religious constraints.

In the last election held, the women of urban areas participated in voting exceeding the expectations. But in many rural areas of Mardān, the women were barred from voting. Many women did not participate in the election because they were afraid to go outside the house. Many women were not permitted by their families. The *mullahs* in some local mosques preached that women should not vote because it is against Islām (Al-Hatimy, 2003).²⁷

Women like Begum Naseem, who led the chief representative party of Pukhtoos and Begum Sarfaraz, who was a contemporary of Fatima Jinnah and was a dominant face in social work and women empowerment activities. These women are an inspiration not only for Mardāni women but Pukhtoon women all around Pukhtoonkhwa and Pakistan.

Methodology

Research in the social sciences can be done by applying broadly two types of methods, i.e. qualitative research and quantitative research. Usually, quantitative research and qualitative research are differentiated from each other on the account that quantitative research employs precise measurement while qualitative research explores the phenomenon in the form of words and phrases instead of quantification in collecting and analysing data (Bryman, 2004). The method employed for this research involved a qualitative approach, in which a qualitative research design was used to explore the perceptions of Ūlemā regarding the political empowerment of women in Pashtūn society. A female interviewer was employed when interviewing female respondents keeping in mind socio-cultural sensitivities.

In-depth Conversational Interviews

The purpose behind interviewing is to find out what the interviewee thinks about a certain topic (Patton, 1982). Additionally, by this method, we are able to capture other people's feelings, perspectives or beliefs. The perspectives are assumed to be meaningful and is explicitly described (Patton, 1982). The quality of the interview depends upon the researcher who acts as an instrument of research as well as the interviewees who give the data (Sparkes, 2002). Additionally, interviews can be useful in generating new knowledge and theoretical perspectives. It is impulsive and unstructured set of questions in a natural conversation (Gall, Gall and Borg, 2003). In this study, questions were asked with the intention to know more about the social settings without having a predetermined set of structured questions. Mostly the questions came as a means for vital understanding of what was observed at a particular moment. With the informal conversational approach, the researchers do not ask any specific type of question but depends on the interaction to run the interview process. In this type of interview, questions are constructed

as the interviewer moves forward. This type of interview enhances flexibility in the nature of the interview. An inductive-deductive analytical approach was taken in the qualitative data analysis process of this study as put forward by Maykut and Morehouse (1994).²⁸

Sample size

A qualitative research design was employed in which participants were recruited from a total of 30 qualitative in-depth conversational (unstructured) interviews were conducted and then the responses were recorded and analysed. The collected data was codified and analyzed in thematic style.

Data Analysis

In the first part of the qualitative data analysis, an inductive-analytical process was used (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994). The initial inductive class coding consisted of refining the classes or categories, exploring the patterns across categories and discovering a sense out of the data (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994). By identifying the initial codes from the interviews, the researchers were able to make sense of the data as a whole (Patton, 2002). In the second stage of inductive analysis, the researchers read and reviewed the transcripts through the method of deductive or interpretive analysis (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994). As Maykut and Morehouse (1994) guided, analytical memos were noted down as a link between theoretical concepts and specific issues that emerged from each respondent's interview. The responses from different participants were united in similar topics and different opinions on a central problem were analyzed to extract themes. Finally, in order to develop a sense of the interpretations by the inductive-deductive analysis method, the findings were reviewed by a senior researcher who was well rehearsed with qualitative methodology.

Findings

One of the respondents said that Islām has prescribed the limits of halal (lawful and allowed) and haram (unlawful and forbidden), which both men and women have to observe in all circumstances. They can engage only in halal pursuits. Nobody is allowed to engage in haram activities. So, if women are engaging their selves in politics that is totally haram activities for women.

A distinguishing feature of the Islāmic scheme for society is that the notion of free intermixing of the two genders is simply alien to it. Therefore, women cannot adopt an occupation or business in which they would have to work in close proximity with men. Chastity and modesty are important values, which give dignity and security to women. As they cannot be compromised, Islām wants women to avoid all situations where there is danger of these values being flouted or violated (Bari, 2005).

Some of the Ūlemā denied the participation of women in politics. They were against the right to vote and the right to contest election. They

were of the opinion that women cannot become the leaders. One of the respondents said that if a nation is led by a woman then it is better for them to die. He said that there are no such examples of women leadership in Islām. Issues commonly associated with women's rights concepts include, but are not limited to, the right to: bodily integrity and autonomy; voting (suffrage); to hold a public office; to work; at fair wages or equal wages; owning property; education; to serve in the army or to be enrolled; conclude legal contracts; and have conjugal, parental and religious rights.

Most of the female *Ūlemā* were not supporting women's participation in politics. They said that it would be better if they stayed inside the home. One of the female respondents said, "*Khaza pa kor kha khakari ao kami khazi che bahar raozi Allah pe lanat warae.*"

(Women look good staying at home; those who go out are cursed by Allah).

This shows that female *Ūlemā* are against women political participation. There is contradiction in the views of these *Ūlemā* because some of the *Ūlemā* are supporting the participation of women in politics, quoting example from the early ages of Islām, when women were taking part side by side with men in the battle field.

The Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) said on more than one occasion that Paradise was under the two feet of the mother. This Hadith raised the status of woman in Arab society where it was considered as furniture. But our religious and political leaders degrade it in our society. Inspired by a weak Hadith, they tried to convince the masses that a woman cannot become the head of the Islāmic state (Khan & Farooq, 2002).²⁹

When Wahabi *Ūlemā* were asked regarding the women status in the society, they were of the opinion that Islām has given complete empowerment to women but it is our culture which is violating the rights of women. Women can participate in every sphere of life but subject to purdah. Effort to improve the status of women in Islām occurred during the early reforms under Islām between 610 and 661, when women were given greater rights in marriage, divorce and inheritance. In 622 the Constitution of Medina was drafted by the Islāmic prophet Muhammad, outlining many of Prophet Muhammad's early reforms under Islām, including an improved legal status for women in Islām, who were generally given greater rights than women in pre-Islāmic Arabia and medieval Europe. Women were not accorded with such legal status in other cultures until centuries later.

There are many historical references to the beginnings of Islām when Muslim men or women join the Prophet's army to fight against his enemies who led the wars after his death. There is also a history of Islām, which is the only one of its kind. Such positions were the result of the Prophet's support and teaching (SWA). Women could participate in social and military affairs. The result of his teaching was not only the promotion

of human rights, but also incentives to defend their rights (Khan, 2001).³⁰

One of the respondents said that The Qur'anic instruction for women to "stay in your houses" does not mean that women must be kept permanently in houses and not allowed to go out. What it means is that women should not leave or forsake their houses if they risk ruining them for lack of attention and care. In the Prophet's era, women used to go for prayers to the mosque, visit the market, and come out of their houses for various other tasks as well. They performed Hajj and Umrah. Nobody restricted their movement. What we need to realize is that Islām has given the internal management and administration of the home to women. It is a woman's responsibility to make the home an abode of peace, comfort and tranquility. Her conduct should not say that the home is not her focus of attention, and that the office or market or factory where she works has absorbed all of her attention. If she comes out of her home after meeting its needs and demands, there is nothing wrong in her going out and it cannot be termed a violation of the Qur'anic instruction "stay in your houses".

With these divine laws, it became a religious duty for every Muslim to fulfill his obligations.

Fatima, daughter of the Prophet (SWA) was well educated and highly respected. It is said that every time Fatima entered the room, the Prophet would stand and give her his seat. His sacrifices to protect and uphold human rights were among the most commendable (Khan & Farooq, 2002).³¹

It has to be said that some interpretation of Shariah makes women's lives totally dependent upon the will of their male guardians especially husband and father. This interpretation gives more importance to the domestic responsibilities of women than their freedom and political participation. However, a more progressive interpretation of Shariah gives freedom of choice to women within the framework of *pardah* (which is also the obligation of men in *Shariah* to have their own *pardah* such as hiding their private parts, lower their gaze and uphold *haya*). Thus, it can be agreed that Islām does not discriminate on the basis of gender in respect to political and economic emancipation.

It can be concluded that most *Ūlemā* from rural communities strongly reject the idea of women participation in politics. This can be a reason for women not encouraged to vote in elections in rural communities. However, in urban areas *Ūlemā* are more tolerant towards women participation in politics.

Conclusion

Due to a variety of reasons, the women's movement in the province could not develop like that in the rest of the country. Even now it is in a nascent stage and is restricted to a few urban centers of the province. Therefore, the description in the following paragraphs relates

primarily to the Women's movement in the Pakistan as whole, with specific reference to the Khyber Pukhtoonkhwa wherever deemed appropriate.

Measures must be taken to ensure the principle of equality as a fundamental right. National legislation must be amended or repealed to remove any discriminatory provision. Positive legislation must be introduced to promote or protect affirmative action measures. The language of the law must clearly address itself to men and women, changing the practice of using the legal 'he' to include 'she'.

Attempt toward closing the gender disparity in Pakistan by the current government and all over the world can prove to be prolific in maintaining peace that is inextricably linked with equality between women and men. Women issues and concerns as a result should especially be addressed and reflected in all concerned laws, policies, plans and programs of action bearing in mind the fact that even in the face of the enormous discrimination and disadvantage women still encounter in most parts of the world and the serious consequences for women themselves and for development trends it would be easy to become discourage but instead they have shown the strength courage and hope and their determine efforts against all odds to prove their mettle as they surely know that the "true emancipation begins neither at the palls nor in courts. It begins in a women soul".

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