

## Muslim Women and their Representation in South Asian Politics

Azra Abidi

### Abstract

*South Asia is home to well over one fifth of the world's population, making it both the most populous and most densely populated geographical region in the world. The region boasts of one of the largest concentration of Muslim population in the world. It has a population of Muslims, which is even more than many Muslim countries combined together. Traditionally, the region of South Asia has welcomed diverse communities and ethnic entities in its fold for centuries and the region is host to many languages, cultures, traditions, folkways, mores which have always attracted the sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists and economists from around the world. This is a well-known fact that South Asia represents a broad variety of western political systems as well as presents indigenous religious traditions. Religion appeared as key factor in the partition of British India; subsequent communal conflicts, sectarian violence perpetrated by different religious communities in the countries of the region could not escape religious influence. The institutional provision of religion in the constitutions of almost all south Asian countries has made it a political force. India is technically a secular, democratic state; Pakistan and Bangladesh have Islam as state religion, Sri Lanka and Bhutan are Buddhist and Nepal a Hindu state. The political leaders as well as military rulers in South Asia have used religion for political legitimacy and integration.*

*The present paper focuses on the participation and representation of Muslim Women in Politics with reference to India, Bangladesh and Pakistan. The paper deals with the role of Muslim women and their contribution in political stability, democracy, secularism, human rights and external/internal security situation. The paper also argues how gender discrimination becomes a barrier to playing a positive role in political issues in contemporary society.*

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**Azra Abidi** is Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Jamia Millia Islamia University, New Delhi. Email: azraabid2002@yahoo.com

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The central argument of the present paper is to discuss the political representation of Muslim women in South Asian politics with reference to India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, which are very different and unique from other regions of the world. Patriarchy and gender inequality are deciding and strong factors in these regions. The present paper examines the socio-economic, cultural, religious and political causes for the low representation of Muslim Women in politics. I also tried to discuss the manner and extent to which the political statuses of Muslim women in India are affected by being women. It evaluates their role in a society in terms of current practices and attitudes. This is also a well-known fact that politics being a male dominated and complicated process represents the final frontier in the struggle for gender equality and justice when we are talking about Muslim women's participation. There is political participation such as voting and campaigning; political spaces for discussing women's issues; identity politics, leadership issues, fair share in government bodies; and political literacy such as awareness of parties and agenda .Another point is how the religious bodies like Muslim personal Law Board and *Ulema (Muslim religious leaders)* react on Muslim women's political participation. We are aware that in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh the religious bodies have a very strong reaction on women's political participation. The paper also deals with the pre-colonial and postcolonial representation of Muslim women leaders in Indian subcontinent. In the end, I mentioned the important challenges in a patriarchic society for political participation of Muslim women in these countries and concluded with some specific suggestions to improve their political representation in South Asian politics.

South Asia is the southern region of the Asian continent, which comprises of sub-Himalayan countries. South Asia typically consists of Bangladesh, Bhutan, the Republic of India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. South Asia is home to well over one fifth of the world's population, making it both the most populous and most densely populated geographical region in the world. South Asia has been invaded and settled by many ethnic groups over the centuries including various Dravidian, Indo-Aryan and Iranian groups. The amalgamation of Dravidian, Indo-Aryan and local tribal cultures over the centuries created common culture, traditions and beliefs. The region boasts of one of the largest concentration of Muslim population in the world. It has a population of Muslims, which is even more than many Muslim countries combined. Traditionally, the region of South Asia has welcomed diverse communities and ethnic entities in its fold for centuries and the region is host to many languages, cultures, traditions, folkways and

mores which has always attracted the sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists and economists from around the world.

Arabs introduced Islam in India. The expansion and propagation of Islam was attempted by peaceful as well as coercive means.. The former was followed by the Arab traders, merchants and Muslim Saints. The later was adopted by the Arab, Turkish and Mughal invaders. The Arab merchants and sailors took active part in India's commerce with east as well as west and they entered India. Islam came to the Indian subcontinent at different periods and was absorbed in a variety of ways. Yet Muslim rule lasted for almost eight centuries, leaving an indelible impression on the history, culture, politics and administration of India. In 1712 C.E., the Arab armies of Mohammad bin Qasim seized part of Baluchistan, stopping at the borders of Sindh.

In fourteenth century Kashmir, Sufi orders originated in Persia and Central Asia merged local traditions with Islamic message of spirituality, egalitarianism and tolerance. The Rishi movement subsequently emerged as an expression of popular social discontent against the norms of Brahmanical society. In western India, the depressed classes were attracted by Islam's message of egalitarianism. In the far south, the influence of Muslim traders and their inter-marriage had led to growth of Islam from the seventh century onwards. Cultural diversity among Muslims-including attitudes, habits, languages and traditions-and a non-uniform diffusion of Islam over the centuries has resulted in a variety of Muslim laws and customary practices within Muslim communities in India. There is a general notion that Muslim law influences the Muslim family and *Shariah* (the set of rules derived from both the Holy Quran and the authentic traditions (Sunnah) of the Prophet and the scholarly opinions (*Ijtihad*) based on Quran and Sunnah. This implies that Muslim families and communities are, in some way, uniquely different from non-Muslims.

The wide variety of customary practices indicates that Muslim communities have either discarded strict adherence to the *Shariah* or reconciled customary practices with it. By doing so, they have preserved a Muslim identity, which is in consonance with and closer to the dominant (i.e. Hindu) culture. Such a synthesis of Hindu and Muslim cultural practices is distinctive feature of Indian composite culture and believes in the notion that solely Islam defines Muslim communities or Muslim women's status in those communities.

From 1000C.E onwards, India was invaded several times by Mahmud of Ghazni-a Turkish noble. In 1192, Muhammad Ghauri-a ruling prince from Afghanistan-entered India through the Indus plain and defeated Prithviraj Chauhan in the battle of Train. The reigns of Mahmud of Ghazni and Muhammad Ghauri laid the basis for Turkish rule in India and established what came to be known as the Delhi Sultanate. After the death of Muhammad

Ghauri his viceroy Qutubuddin Aibak founded the Slave Dynasty and ruled northern India from 1206 to 1210. After Qutubuddin Aibak his Slave Iltutmish ruled and in his life he appointed his intelligent daughter Razia as Sultan of Delhi Sultanate. Iltutmish justifying his decision said, “my sons are incapable of leading and for that reason I have decided that it is my daughter who should rule after me.” (I. Prasad, *Medieval History of India*, 88 Quoted in M.Y. al Najrani, *Al-alaqa al Siyasiya wa Thaqafiyya banya al Hind wa al Khalifa al Abbasiya*, Dar al –Fikr, Beirut, 1979, P.125).

Razia Sultan was the first Muslim Woman in Indian history who ruled in 13<sup>th</sup> century (1236-40). She was very progressive in outlook and dynamic in action. She was opposed to the conservative and orthodox spirit of her times. She was a great sovereign, sagacious just, beneficent, the patron of the learned, a dispenser of justice, the cherisher of her subjects, of war like talent and endowed it all the admirable attributes and qualifications necessary for kings. However, the Turkish nobles of the court thought otherwise. They were too proud and it hurt their feelings to bow before a woman.

Razia encouraged education, she appointed the known historian Minhajus Siraj as in – charge of Nasiri College and established several schools. Her undue favours to Jamaluddin Yaqut an Abyssinian, in raising him to the high office of Amirul-Umra offended the Mamluks, the 40 Amirs. Although, she succeeded in establishing her authority and restored peace and prosperity, but she could not enjoy a peaceful reign.

The Delhi Sultanate continued with the subsequent Turkish dynasties of the Khiljis and Tughlaqs. In 1526 the Mughal emperor Babar founded Mughal rule in India. Mughals spanning nearly two centuries and seven rulers, ended in 1857 with the death of Bahadur Shah Zafar (died in 1862 in Burma after exile), the last Mughal emperor. During Mughal period, there were examples of women participation in politics. Noor Jahan, wife of Jahangir, had more interference in political matters than any other Mughal queens. Purdah and ideology of menfolk did not permit women in public life, though we have some Mughal women scholars like Gulbadan Bano Begum, daughter of Mughal emperor Babur. Gulbadan Begum was the first Mughal woman to document the social realities of Mughal women in *Humayun Namah*. Zaibun Nisa daughter of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb was an eminent poet and theologian. However, they were never taken part in politics.

Chand Bibi (1580-1599) is one of the most gallant Muslim women in the history of India. She combined gallantry and wisdom in her personality. Chand Bibi was married to Ali Adil Shah, the Sultan of Bijapur. After her husband’s death, her husband’s nephew Ibrahim Adil Shah II was raised to the throne under the guardianship of Chand Bibi and she gave him sound training. She tried to improve the affairs of the state, but found difficult it to adjust to

the turbulent nobles of Bijapur. Disgusted in 1584, she left for Ahmadnagar where she lived for twelve years. She returned to Bijapur only when people of that city invited her with one voice to defend them from the attack of the Mughal prince Murad, but Chand Bibi was quite aware of her adversary's strength and when Murad offered to withdraw his troops in return for the cession of Berar, she accepted the offer and Mughal army returned. Chand Bibi was not only a military genius and good administrator, but she was a good scholar of Arabic and Persian and a patron of scholars.

Begum Hazrat Mahal, wife of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah of Oudh was a prominent leader who actively participated in the country's first war of independence. The Indian Judith of the sepoy mutiny and heroic consort of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah was the last of the Begums of Oudh who shot into prominence during the Indian war of independence of 1857. She has left her own mark on the Indian history. She exercised the authority, showed qualities of leadership and diplomacy, and appointed Hindus and Muslims to the high offices of the state. However, Hazrat Mahal was not fated to rule the state for long (she died in Nepal in 1879). Marginalized within the new colonial settings, Muslims were left with a feeling of inertia. In the absence of a male heir, Qudsiya Begum, (1819-44), Sikandar Begum (1819-1868) Shah Jahan Begum (1838-1910) and Sultan Jahan Begum (1858-1930) ruled Bhopal as Begums of Bhopal. After the death of her husband, Nawab Nazar Mohammad Khan, Qudsiya Begum became regent for her daughter Sikandar Jahan. After she ascended the throne, she continued to guide and counsel her daughter. It was her aim to demonstrate that Muslim woman could rule as effectively as any man. She abandoned the veil, learnt to ride and led her forces in combat. She had a difficult relationship with British, recognized the importance of maintaining good relation with them, but on the other hand she resented their interference in her government. For over three quarters of a century, Bhopal had been ruled by Muslim women.

In principle, women's active participation in political arena in South Asian countries and other parts of the world represents one of the manifestations of modernity and a novel phenomenon. However, what has been observed as a rule in political scene has been women's historical seclusion and alienation from politics in a way that some have spoken of 'private women' and 'public men'. In other words, women were regarded as belonging to the private sphere which was the realm of household and family and men as belonging to the public sphere that was the realm of social activities, politics and state. Gaston Bottelle, the French sociologist, views women's entry into political scene in the modern age as a true exception and an extraordinary and unusual phenomenon. Because of this historical seclusion from the political scene, political participation has consistently been one of the major demands of

women over the past century and has constantly been sought as one of the main goals in every women's movements and activities (*Gaston Bottelle, Overpopulation, trans. Hassan Pouyan, Tehran: Chapakhsh, 1991, p. 246*).

The first phase of the women's movement emerged in India in the 1920s; it had the effect of consolidating changes, which had been initiated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century through social reforms, and of instituting further and more radical changes in the range and variety of roles women could play in society. It also provided Indian women with a platform from which they could function as a pressure group and influence political parties and government to support their causes. However, by the turn of the century the writings of Hali and Moulvi Nazir Ahmad showed recognition of the fact that Muslim Women had no power to exercise any of their rights, due to *purdah* and lack of education. By 1900 *purdah* clubs were being set up throughout India to take the issues of Muslim Women with the help of elite Muslim educated women. This club provided a platform for discussion and exchange of views. In 1905, a Muslim Ladies Conference was organized by Atiya Begum in Aligarh, in 1907, the Anjuman-i-Khwateen –Islam was set up in Lahore by Begum Shafi. Many conferences and organizations of Muslim Women emerged between 1901 to 1925. These organizations took up the issues of education, polygamy and Muslim women's Islamic rights. Among the many such organizations were the Anjuman-i-Khwateen-Deccan formed in 1919, and the Lucknow women's organization to which the Muslim women activists such as Begum Habibullah, Begum Waseem, Begum Aijaz Rasul and Lady Wazir Hasan belonged. In Allahabad, Lady Sulaiman formed the imperial Ladies Club. In 1926 All India Women's Conference was held which was joined by most of the Muslim women leaders. The activities of Muslim women leaders reflected their concern for education, polygamy and even economic independence.

The participation of Muslim Women in post-colonial phase with reference to three important south Asian countries i.e. India, Pakistan (1947) and Bangladesh (1971) has undergone organizational and ideological changes. When we are looking at the representation of women in Indian politics, we should see the figures of Women Parliamentarians. In India, only 8% of parliamentarians were women and Muslim women in Indian politics are very few. Mrs. Mohsina Qidwai leader and political worker of Congress party, Mrs. Anwara Timur former Chief Minister of Assam and Rajya Sabha Member, Mrs. Mahbooba Mufti from Jammu and Kashmir and Mrs. Mausam Choudhry from West Bengal are few names in the national politics. Eleven years after the Beijing Conference, women are still politically severely under-represented. Structural transformation is needed, in the form of reservation of seats for women (preferably 50%), to ensure women are given the opportunity to participate in decision-making, and to overcome the current institutionalized inequality.

In India the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> amendments passed in 1992 has been instrumental in gaining a vast representation of women in local government institutions (one third representation of women in local government, as well as one third chair persons to be women, but there are still no seats for women in State Legislative Assembly nor in Parliament at national level .The demand for the reservation in the parliament by women group has raised many eyebrows and severe criticism. Many a times the bill was taken up in the parliament but failed but on 8 March 2010, UPA Government placed this Bill in Rajya Sabha and this Bill has been passed with majority. Now Government is planning to present this Bill in Lok Sabha. Women's past experience in the parliament have convinced them of the futility of getting into parliament without reservation. In the recent past, the provision for political representation has emerged as the single most significant demand made by the women's movement all over India. The major agenda in the various seminars and workshop is the 33% reservation in the parliament and state legislature.

After the foundation of Pakistan as an Islamic country, the representation of Muslim women was not very high and only a few elite and politically oriented Muslim Women took part in national level politics. Fatima Jinnah a well-known woman politician took part in Pakistan's national politics. She was secretary and political advisor of the Father of Pakistan, Mohammad Ali Jinnah. She had widespread popular support but lost the election in Pakistan. Begum Rana Liaquat Ali Khan was also a well-known personality in Pakistan National politics. She was ambassador to the Netherlands, Tunisia and Italy between 1954 to 1966..Benazir Bhutto, daughter of former Prime Minister of Pakistan Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, and former Prime Minister and leader of Pakistan People's Party was elected two times as Prime Minister, 1988-90 and 1993-96. All these women belong to elite class and had a very strong political family background .Most of the Muslim women in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh do not have political support and connections with political parties and that is why they are still invisible.

In 1956, Pakistan's constitution provided 10 reserved seats for women in the National Assembly. In January 1999, the Pakistan People's Party introduced a bill in the Senate, proposing 9 reserved seats for women in the Senate, 40 in the National Assembly (double the previous number) and 20% in the Provincial Assembly (four times the previous reservation).However, reserved seats have been reintroduced in 2002. 60 seats are reserved for women in Pakistan National Assembly. Presently a total of 71 women have obtained representation at national level, 60 on reserved seats and 11 on general seats. Women occupy 128 seats in provincial Assemblies. In local government presently, 33% seats are reserved for women and 36,191 women have been elected to local councils.

In Pakistan, with the reintroduction of the reserved seats, there is a marked increase in women's representation. It was over 20% women at national level and almost 70% at provincial level. A countrywide signature campaign undertaken by the advocacy organizations was very important in this respect. Massive endorsements were received from more than 50 civil society organizations, thousands of individuals, leaders and 19 political parties, some ministers and office bearers of several women wings.

In Bangladesh, gender discrimination is deeply imbedded in the social structure and women are discriminated against in family, society, workplace and political arena like India and Pakistan. The 1972 Constitution of Bangladesh reserves 15 seats for women in parliament. In 1976 quota was increased by 100% (30 seats). This provision lapsed in 1987. It was revised in 1990. In 1991 election, 36 women contested in the National Parliament and 4 were elected. At present percentage of women in parliament is 2%. In the National parliament of Bangladesh, with 30 reserve seats in the parliament in the elections of 1991 and 1996, the number of women in general and the reserved seat was 35 [5+30 or 10.60% and 11.20% respectively] Now with the withdrawal of the reserved seats in April 12, 2001 the number of women declined from 37 to 6 during elections held in 2001 [only 2% total women participation]. Lack of education among women is often cited as the reason for their low participation, but this is not the case in reality; it is due to the lack of political and social will to support them.

Moreover, popular history has not sufficiently documented the political contribution that women have made to Bangladesh society. One may recall here that Bangladeshi women did participate in the anti-British political movement in the 1930s and 1940s. In the aftermath of independence in 1947, women also participated in the autonomy and democratic movements when Bangladesh was a part of Pakistan. Although women have played a significant role in the liberation struggle of Bangladesh in 1971, their historical contributions remain largely invisible.

Women, for the first time, exercised their voting rights in Bangladesh when it was a part of Pakistan. Women voted in the 1954 East Pakistan Provincial Assembly Elections where only one woman was elected despite the fact that there was a provision for ten reserved seats for women at that time. Women also exercised their voting rights in the 1970 general elections of Pakistan. It may be stated here that the government of Bangladesh established the Ministry of Women Affairs to mainstreaming women in the development process and promoting gender equality and empowerment of women. In fact, Bangladesh is one of the few countries in the world that set up a separate ministry for women. Still, during the past decades, Bangladesh had one of the lowest levels of women participation in politics. In the



first general election in 1973, only two women were nominated by the major parties and both women were defeated in the elections. Consequently, women's active participation in politics and government was unusual and minimal until the early 1980s. Women's participation in politics was widely discouraged and denied by the major political parties. In particular, the religious-based political parties such as the Jamat-e-Islami did not believe in gender equality and viewed women's direct participation as anti-Islamic. These kinds of objections are raised not only in Bangladesh; in India and Pakistan too, the religious *Ulema* are also against Muslim Women's political participation.

Undoubtedly, of the most vital resources of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh is its people. Women make up nearly half of the population and work force of these countries. It is essential that they participate in sufficient numbers in politics and government to ensure a truly democratic and representative government. However, women's participation in politics continues to be discouraged, denied and resisted. As pointed out by Choudhry, in Bangladesh, women have remained outside the game of power politics. Their visibility in popular struggle for democracy, in election campaigns and in community work has not translated into greater influence in public domain. Only a small number have been able to enter positions of public decision making.<sup>1</sup> Particularly in recent years, it is alleged that there is a set price for securing a party's nomination. With meager financial resources, women are highly disadvantaged to gain preference of the political parties. Even if they have money, they may not gain party nomination because they are women. An international survey conducted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union demonstrates that Bangladesh ranked 122 globally out of 184 countries with only 2.0 per cent of women members in the national parliament in 2001.<sup>2</sup> In most developing countries, women political leaders more often than not rise to power in times of social or political distress. Both Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina ascended to power in times of social and political turmoil in Bangladesh. We also observe similar scenario in other Asian countries such as Corazon Aquino of the Philippines, Srimavo Bandaranaike of Sri Lanka, Megawati Sukarnoputri of Indonesia, and Indira Gandhi and Sonia Gandhi of India, and Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan.

The highly popular women leaders at the top of public office have entered into politics mainly because of family connections. In South Asian Countries especially in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, Muslim Women's entry into politics is considerably dependent upon their families past or present direct involvement in the power structure and social activities. Despite

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<sup>1</sup>.Mohiudddin Ahmed Chowdhury, *Bangladesh Towards 21st Century*, p. 178.

<sup>2</sup>. See Inter-parliamentary Union, *Women in National Parliament*, (Dhaka), June 2002, p.

having women leaders at the top, women remain highly excluded from government and politics and subjected to oppression and discrimination. Moreover, existing laws seem unable to protect women effectively from violence and economic deprivation. There is also very limited women participation in party hierarchical structure. Indeed; little advancement of women in the realm of politics has taken place as women face severe economic and social constraints as well as cultural impediments. Besides social biases and situational barriers, women also lack education and the support of parties and volunteers. As a result, the status of women has remained very low, dismal, and depressing.

### **Reasons for low representation of Muslim Women in Politics**

Everywhere men are more visible in politics than women are. A leading political scientist and former chairperson of the Women Studies Department at the University of Dhaka observed that politics in Bangladesh remains male-dominated with respect to number, position in the party hierarchy, presence, and effectiveness in national parliament. (Salma Sohhan in Valentine M. Moghadam (ed.), *Gender and National Identity: Women and Politics in Muslim Societies*, London and New Jersey, 1994, p. 75). It is true for Indian Muslim Women and Pakistani Muslim Women too. A number of obstacles have kept the representation of women in government and politics low. In fact, the time constraints associated with women's traditional roles as wife and mother as well as the frequent lack of family support for women seeking elected office still remains as one of the primary reasons for women's inability to make any advancement into politics. The reasons and obstacles why only a few Muslim women are in politics even today can be attributed to religious and economic factors, social biases, obstacles, and negative attitudes based on gender roles and stereotypes that continue to persist. The patriarchal and feudal culture that has dominated the society with its social attitude and role expectation has placed women within the realm of domestic life or in narrowly defined work roles. In addition, most of the religious-based parties, all the time wanted to restrict women's rights and equality and intentionally deny women's political participation. Salma notes that in most of the Muslim societies, the fundamentalists urge the full submission of women to their husbands and expect them to always be obedient in the name of social order and religious doctrines.

In fact, there are multiple explanations for the low numbers of Muslim women in politics. Besides situational barriers, economic problems and dependency, political and social violence, and lack of education and political knowledge, one major explanation is that Muslim women have been conditioned not to take much interest in government and politics. They are also rarely pre-selected by the major political parties for possible winning seats. Another

reason for their under-representation is that women have been reluctant to run for parliament due to domestic responsibilities.

### **Illiteracy and ignorance of Muslim Women**

The literacy rate of Muslim women in India is 51.1% (South Asia Report, 2001) in Pakistan 36% (according to UN report, Press International Reports, 2005, Pakistan) and in Bangladesh 35.6% (Education Watch, 2002, Education in Bangladesh : Need For A new Vision, June 2003.). Boys are encouraged to attend school whereas girls are of more use in the home. This denial of basic education means that the majority of women do not realize that they are not receiving their full rights. It is difficult to teach them when they cannot read and difficult for them to stand up for themselves when they cannot write.

### **Veil (Hijab) System**

*Hijab* is the Quranic requirement that Muslims, both male and female, dress and behave modestly. The most important Quranic verse relating to *Hijab* is *Sura 24:31* of holy Quran which says, "And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and guard their private parts and not to display their adornment except that which ordinarily appears thereof and to draw their head covers over their chests and not to display their adornment except to their (*maharim*)...". (*Maharim* is plural of *Mahram* and this category refers to all those males whom a woman cannot marry at anytime in her life whatsoever; in other words a male who is forbidden permanently, forever (i.e. one's father, brother or son etc).

Islamic scholars agree that a woman should act and dress in a way that does not draw sexual attention to her when she is in the presence of someone of the opposite sex. Some Islamic scholars specify which areas of the body must be covered; most of these require that everything besides the face and hands be covered (this is allowed for prayer also). Sartorial *hijab* as practiced varies throughout the Muslim world. In Iran, strict *hijab* requirements are enacted in law, while in Muslim-majority areas of India, social norms rather than law dictate the wearing of *hijab*. At the opposite end of the spectrum is Tunisia, where the government is actively discouraging women from wearing the veil.

It is important to differentiate between *purdah* (the practice of preventing men from seeing women) and *hijab*. *Hijab* is an Islamic tradition that is based on physical and psychological morality, while *purdah* does not necessarily conform to Islamic teachings. One more thing I would like to add here is that in Islam *hijab* never became a barrier to achieve education and empowerment of women but the feudal male, conservative religious leaders (*Ulema*) and elite class (*Ashraf*) misinterpret it.

### **Strong Cultural values and norms of Society**

It is generally accepted by a majority of Muslim people that the women's role is in the home. Islam promotes them through equality but male dominated society always push Muslim women to the house. When they are constantly being told that they are not intelligent enough to participate in politics, it is no wonder that they do not believe in themselves. Women are generally encouraged to believe that politics is much to complicate for them to understand and so it is best left to men. They should stay at home, cooking and cleaning and having children. Women who do have a slight inclination to achieve something in life might be encouraged to be a nurse, midwife or school teacher as these are jobs in their league.

### **Patriarchal Values of Muslim community**

The main reason for low political participation of women in politics is the patriarchal structure of society. According to our traditions and culture, the participation of women in politics and the public eye is against the generally accepted role of women. The patriarchal values have subjugated and distempered women.

### **Misrepresentation of female affairs**

The thought and practice of Muslims have come lately to misrepresent most of the doctrinal and normative teachings of Islam on female affairs. The female is hardly ever religiously addressed except through the mediation of the male and as an addendum to him. In the fallen society of Muslims, women have little freedom to marry the person they like, or to separate from a husband she loathes. Nor is she, as wife, entitled to full consultation and gracious companionship by her husband. In many cases she hardly enjoys an equal opportunity to earn and own property, or the full capacity to manage her property or to dispose thereof. All sorts of subterfuges are employed to deny her inheritance. Her role in private life has been reduced to that of a homemaker chosen not for her personal merit, for she was denied the education or the opportunity to acquire merit, but for the merit of her men folk.

In the domain of public life, she is not allowed to make any original contribution to the promotion of the religious quality of life. Whenever she was allowed to work towards the material development of life that was likely to be in a context of exploitation or as mundane work with little spiritual satisfaction or significance.

### **Segregation and isolation from the general society**

The greatest injustice visited upon women is their segregation and isolation from the general society. Sometimes the slightest aspect of her public appearance would be considered a form of obscene exhibitionism. Even her voice was bracketed in the same category. Her mere presence at a place where men are also present was considered shameful. She was confined to her home in a manner prescribed in Islam only as a penal sanction for an act of adultery. She was so isolated on the pretext that she might devote herself exclusively to the care of her children and the service of her husband. However, how could she qualify for attending to domestic affairs or to the rearing of children in a satisfactory manner without being versed through education or experience, in the moral and functional culture of the wider society?

### **Negative attitude of family members**

Family support can either prevent or promote women from participating in politics. Women who come from families with a strong political history will often be encouraged to continue the work of past relatives. Women generally need to receive permission from their husbands or fathers in order to embark on a political career. Without this permission and support, it would be very difficult for women to become a successful politician. This is not only because of the financial help, which is so often required, but also for moral encouragement.

The role that women have in the home gives additional ties to female politicians, which reduce their mobility. Women who are married and trying to bring up children while keeping, home will find it almost impossible to work full time as well.

### **Criminals involvement in today Politics**

Criminalization in politics has increased rapidly in recent years. mafia, money, manipulation and muscle power have played dominant roles in South Asian politics. Because of this scenario, it is very difficult to motivate and encourage women to come forward and take part in this "dirty game". Women feel that it is not their territory, that men are better players than they are

### **Lack of proper Institutional Support**

However, there are many institutions established for the overall development of women but there is a lack of institutional mechanism, which can encourage and support women to take part in elections. There are many women's organizations related to different

political parties but they have not been able to provide moral and financial support to women who are interested in becoming involved in politics.

### **Poverty and Economic Dependency of Muslim Women**

As already mentioned, funds are required in order to embark upon a political career. The majority of Muslim women are financially dependent upon their husbands or fathers. Women without money do not have the freedom to make their own decisions and do, as they want. A woman who wants to become involved in politics but has no funds must have the support of her family. This can be difficult to obtain because of the cultural way of thinking and poor family background.

### **Conservative views on Women Matters**

Muslims who advance conservative views on female affairs normally take a literal view in their understanding of texts; but they tendentiously opt for an understanding that suits their prejudice. Islam is not a matter of a single rule that can be flexibly understood; it is a whole order of norms that establish the entire way of life or social structure of Islam, and is not liable to variation.

In order to encourage more women to participate in politics the following activities have been formulated:

1. Participation in Decision Making Policy
2. School Text Books
3. Civil Society and Media's Role
4. Elite Muslim Women should come forward
5. Change in the value system
6. Leadership Development
7. Transformative Politics
8. Support from Women's Pressure groups
9. Increase the number of seats reserved for women
10. Electoral Reform
11. Economic Empowerment
12. Training and Awareness for Muslim Women
13. Formation of Alliances and Networking Groups for Motivation
14. Affirmative Action
15. Success Stories of Muslim Women

16. Create a campaigning fund for Muslim women
17. Support from the Political Parties
18. Religious literature with right interpretation should be displayed

### **Conclusion**

It will be impossible to bring any change to policies without increasing the representation of women in the various levels of the political power structure. Women need to learn about politics, its impacts and its positive consequences. They must understand the importance of their vote. Everyone must realize that women are essential parts of a political system. The voices of women strengthen democracy and will lead to a peaceful, developed and equal society. Political parties should encourage more women to enter into politics. They should not be used only as votes but to help bring about change to the present political structure

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