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Patriarchal Grasp over Voting Behavior of Women in Rural Punjab

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Abstract

The patriarchal grasp rooted in Pakistani society has been overpowering women. It is a consequence of the patriarchal embedment in social structures of Pakistan that ranked it 145th in the global gender gap index among 146. This study aimed to observe the patriarchal grasp over the political behaviors of women. The researchers used a case study research design. A total of 30 participants were interviewed, including both men and women, through an interview guide with the help of a purposive sampling technique. The analysis was done using the thematic analysis technique. The themes were political association, the extent of participation, political awareness, opinion-building, and decision-making. These significant themes collectively underpin women's voting behavior. It also explored the socially fenced barriers women face to practice their civic rights in the political arena.

Keywords: Patriarchy, Political participation, Decision-making, Voting behavior, Political system.



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1. Introduction

This study analyzes the political significance of women in rural Punjab, a region characterized by entrenched patriarchal norms. Hooks (2013) characterizes patriarchy as a system in which males exert dominance over other genders, exercising power and control, frequently rationalized through biological and social constructs. Historically, sexual orientation and perceived physical superiority have reinforced this system, as indicated by Darwin's (1859) concept of "natural selection" and Spencer's survival theories, which marginalized alternative traits (Ghani, Mani, & O'Connell, 2013). Although early societies held mother goddesses in high regard and acknowledged women's contributions by monarchs, patriarchal structures progressively confined women to inferior positions. Religious practices, militarization, and economic structures reinforced male dominance, diminishing women's egalitarian status and political influence. Patriarchy developed as a social and political structure, designating fixed roles and narratives to genders (Habiba, Ali, & Ashfaq, 2016). The arrangements sustain the marginalization of women within political and cultural domains (Johnson, 2005).

Sultana (2011) asserted that patriarchy has the capacity to subordinate the opposing gender while executing its routine functions. The socially constructed strata enable masculine genders to exercise rights over their female counterparts and other family members (Habiba, Ali, & Ashfaq, 2016). Societies exemplify this by delineating roles for men and women, necessitating the execution of specific tasks while prohibiting certain activities (Hooks, 2013). Both males and females associate these tasks with their daily routines, societal roles in decision-making, and actions in selecting political leaders. This study investigates the voting behavior of rural women, considering their engagement with diverse political perspectives. This study examines socialization patterns within the socio-political system of the regions under investigation. This study engages readers in a discussion regarding the gendered phenomenon influencing their participation in the specified sphere. This study examines the socio-cultural dimensions of delayed political rights and the marginalization of females in this context. It also discusses the rural patterns within the nations of society. This work examines the complexities and experiences of women, outlining the environments they have engaged with over time to understand and navigate the political system. Other patterns are delayed due to a deficiency in the previously discussed will.

Prior research has examined varying nature of patriarchy existing within society. Sharabi (1988) introduced the concept of "neopatriarchy," which significantly impacts the masculine gender's engagement and administration of social tasks (Habiba, Ali & Ashfaq, 2016). Women roles have been restricted to household chores and compliance with their male heads (Cotter et al., 2011). Blackstone (2003) endorses Oakley's 1972 distinction between gender and sex, which has evolved progressively through diverse social practices. Stets and Burke (2015) proposed a division of gender role development into masculine and feminine segments.

Gerhard Lenski has formulated a hierarchy in the evolution of human societies, emphasizing gender roles derived from physical or masculine strength. This hierarchy has resulted in the emergence of significant structures within society (Nunn, Alesina, & Giuliano, 2011). This hierarchy has established the basis for diverse socialization patterns and the evolution of linear psychological patterns in human societies throughout history (Stets & Burke, 2015). In Pakistani societies, patriarchy functions as a primary framework for restructuring social roles, empowering males to dominate females in social matters, especially in decision-making (Mahmood, 2002). Nosheen et al. (2009) also noted the restricted autonomy of women in political activities.

Politics involves the management of constitutional affairs, offering various policies and frameworks to govern society, the state, and its structures through a democratic voting system employed by the populace in any nation (Shahwar & Asim, 2012). The claim for women's political participation has been ongoing since the suffragist movement of the previous century, aiming to secure socio-political rights for women (Bari, 2005; Qayyum et al., 2013). Women have historically been marginalized in political affairs due to perceptions of their inability to manage the associated work-life risks and challenges. These challenges have been shaped by the established gender social roles linked to women (Rosaldo & Lamphere, 1974). Women are confined to the domestic sphere and are often excluded from holding governmental positions. Their roles within the political system are influenced by various societal factors (Rosaldo & Lamphere, 1974).

Chhiber (2003) contended that the subjective profile of women in the political realm is influenced by socialization processes perpetuated by a patriarchal society, which serves to diminish their representation in this domain. The liberal political philosophy subsequently stimulated women's political opportunities and rights, aligning with suffragist movements advocating for these rights. Pakistan is undergoing political turmoil, necessitating sustainable solutions to achieve political stability. Understanding mature political procedures is essential for establishing a politically stable environment in the country. Shami (2011) examined the political landscape of women in Pakistan, emphasizing the lack of female political representation since the country's inception, which has impeded the development of specific programs and the progress of women's political participation.

Reyes (2002), Saiyid (2001), and Naz (2001) examined the presence of abrupt ratios in Pakistan, attributing this phenomenon to cultural influences, societal traditions, baradari systems, religion, castes, and other factors affecting electoral processes and women's representation (Qayyum et al., 2013). Moreover, women lack the ability to vote autonomously. They are required to vote according to the recommendations of their peers and face various challenges in the process. Their families are against their voter registration. Women in pastoral ranges are prohibited from accessing polling stations and express dissatisfaction with the vote-casting system (Qayyum et al., 2013).

The discussion regarding the obstacles women encounter in political participation (Bari, 2005) underscores various socio-cultural issues and challenges faced by females. Shannon (2014) argues that women encounter obstacles to political participation. They endure socialization and training that incapacitates them in political management. This hinders the development of confidence in their abilities. The phrase "politics is not their cup of tea" is predominantly linked to women, who are often viewed as outside this profession (Shanon, 11 March 2014).

Rahman, Ahmad, and Ejaz (2015) examined female representation in the 2013 elections and concluded that women are often undervalued or regarded merely as symbolic figures. They noted that women's politics is frequently undervalued, with a tendency to prioritize personal attributes over political policies and agendas. Men in politics, as the dominant political group, exert control over the system, resulting in the marginalization of women within the political framework. They are regarded solely due to the prominence of their male relatives and are perceived as participants in their political spheres, as men are believed to support and direct women.

There is a significant need to understand women's behaviors within the political system in Punjab. The examination of voting behaviors, encompassing conscience, control, and access to participation, is crucial in understanding its relationship with the political empowerment of women in society. Observations indicate that various factors, particularly social structural elements,

influence the political behaviors of women, with patriarchal influence being a persistent aspect of social structures in Punjab. This necessitates an exploration of the influential factors that have shaped the political behaviors of women in society and their significant impact.

2. Methodology

The research was conducted using qualitative methodology. The researchers used case study method as a research design to understand the political participation of women. We opted patriarchal framework to analyze their experiences. We employed purposive sampling technique to select the respondents from rural areas of Gujranwala, Punjab. The respondents were selected on the basis of their participation in last two general elections. The researchers developed the interview guide to collect the data. Data were collected by conducting in-depth face-to-face interviews until data saturation was reached. The data were collected from 30 participants. Ethical considerations, such as informed consent and participant confidentiality, were observed. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, translated, and thematic analysis was conducted.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Political Associations of Women

The findings indicate a low level of political association among females. This evidence facilitated an understanding of the significant barriers to women's low participation in politics, contingent upon their association with particular political parties. A study participant pointed out that their lack of political affiliations complicates the interpretation of this reality. This indicates that women in rural societies lack political affiliations. Other participants expressed support for this perspective. Patriarchs possess political affiliations, while women lack them, and they feel obligated to follow their fathers' political choices (Rehana 27). The addition indicates that rural women have not engaged in political associations in their political behaviors; instead, they follow the leads of men due to the prevailing classical patriarchy in rural areas of Pakistan (Habiba, Ali, & Ashfaq, 2016; Hooks, 2013). The phenomenon was similarly examined by male members of the society, who possess political hegemony. They dismissed the need for women's political association, asserting that such an association is, in fact, unnecessary. Participation occurs in accordance with the decisions made by family heads, who are recognized as responsible for political decision-making (Ahmed 26). Women in rural areas exhibit a lack of awareness regarding political associations and do not align with any political party. Patriarchal traditions and established political patterns within their communities primarily influence their voting behavior.

It is also evident that they have not been in any conscience of a political association, as the participants shared that they do not feel the need for any political association, nor do they bear any purpose in getting an association (Sidra 29). This indicates that rural women are not aware of the issues associated with political parties, nor do they perceive them as necessary or important. On another front, it's important to acknowledge that women's direct or indirect affiliations with political parties, whether direct or indirect, are subject to their discretion. This is due to the fact that we lack formal political affiliations, and if we do, it's based on the preference of our male family members (Ayesha 26).

The preceding response indicates that a specific political association is connected to the decisions made by family heads and their verdicts based on "Baradri." The verdicts are fundamentally influenced by societal hegemony, a trend that has endured for generations. If it lacks conscience, future generations will evaluate it critically. These roots serve as significant channels that maintain a cycle in which individuals accept and adopt specific structures within political frameworks. The researcher aims to establish a link between Structuration theory and social structures in rural

communities. Individuals function as actors within the context of their rural environment. The rural environment endures through time, impacting its participants, who subsequently enact and define the resultant space referred to as culture and society. Women are subjected to the regulations and expectations of the social system, resulting in a social structure that limits their awareness of political matters. They are also disinclined to engage with political agents, who restrict them further within their confines and domestic spaces. In rural society, men assume active roles while women are positioned as passive subjects. Subsequent to their interactions, rural communal norms and values develop, creating a constrained framework and limited societal foundation for them.

3.2. Political Awareness of Women

Another participant in the survey indicated that they lack a consistent medium for engaging in politics and other pertinent activities, apart from family leaders, thus they relied on the presumed conduit of familial connections (Shaysta 28). This demonstrates the absence of supposed avenues for political education and the support necessary to exercise their rights effectively; male family members serve as the exclusive sources for acquiring and practicing political awareness.

Moreover, social media and television networks have substantially influenced the political education of women in recent years, alongside familial factors. At home, they often have the opportunity to witness contemporary political events, which constitutes an essential foundation for political education. Nevertheless, it does not alter the political or patriarchal framework. Nevertheless, it may function as a prospective instrument to contest conventional standards. A participant proposed that rural women might require time to integrate into the mainstream, despite having access to the internet and television. Consequently, it raises several inquiries in my mind regarding the longstanding political structures in our region (Nimra 31). The comment suggests that the introduction of technology may affect longstanding practices in rural areas of Pakistan.

Women in rural areas rely on their family, which results in their automatic influence and direction (Shakila 32). A male participant indicated that women's dependence on their families significantly influences their political decisions (Akraam, 29). The aforementioned positions suggest that women's domestic dependency on their historically male-dominated households considerably impacts their political decisions.

3.3. Patriarchal Influence on Political Behaviors

The patriarchal political system has been observed to embed itself within broader systemic phenomena, entrenching traditions and exerting control to inhibit change. The political practices of both male and female members of society are significantly influenced by entrenched beliefs, as differing opinions or individual participation are perceived as challenges to established rituals and the family system. The participant's perspective emphasized that alignment of male family members or the family head with a specific political party could lead to familial shame for those who maintain associations with the opposing party (Aslam 55). A female has expressed a similar viewpoint: if women articulate opinions that diverge from those of our family or Baradari, it is perceived as a disgrace to our family. We aim to prevent our family from experiencing social disgrace, as it would adversely affect our family's reputation (Attiya, 30).

Women exert considerable power over their own decisions. They must uphold familial dignity and respect by adhering to their patriarchal and social customs. Walby (1990) articulated those patriarchal institutions permeate society via social norms, values, and cultural and religious rituals. They are unable to adopt an alternative approach to prevent any dishonor to themselves and their families. Nonetheless, we note that men and women encounter this behavior uniformly.

It is demonstrated that while women hold significant positions, they often lack political affiliation or, when they do, are heavily influenced by their fathers, Baradari, or societal norms, which restrict their esteemed roles both in society. The researcher analyzed the phenomenon to establish a connection with Marx's class system theory, which addresses the role of class in social structures. Two classes have emerged within the political system as a result of social structures, with men constituting the dominant class that exerts control over the oppressed class, represented by women in society.

Researchers noted the low participation of women in rural areas in political activities. A male member articulated the view that women should not participate in politics, asserting that it is outside their realm of expertise. This perspective represents a definitive rejection of women's political rights; as male members of society assert that women should not engage in politics. One participant noted that women often refrain from political engagement due to challenges in participating in rallies and campaigns (Waris, 37).

Many female participants indicated a disinterest in politics and a preference to remain uninvolved in such issues when solicited for their opinions. Most females appear to refrain from exercising their rights in this context and exhibit limited interest in political matters. A female participant contended that women's disinterest in these activities arises from insufficient exposure or education in this domain (Ayesha 27). Women, who comprise half of the political voters in Pakistan, are not even informed well about their political rights, nor are they supported to practice it by performing the political activities, including the behavior of political discussions and debates and participation in political activities like processions and movements. The bias towards females in socialization contributes to the political marginalization of women, affecting their ability to exercise political rights, stemming from socialization processes and influential structures such as families. Women are underrepresented in political spheres, as they are primarily socialized into domestic roles and responsibilities, while lacking awareness and education regarding their civic rights (Chhiber, 2002).

3.4. Marginalization of Women in Politics

The limited participation of females in politics can be attributed not only to minimal personal interest but also to the patriarchal structure prevalent in Pakistan. This structure is deeply rooted in societal norms, customs, and the social mobility of women. Additionally, the political marginalization of women and their political rights significantly influences their participation in the political sphere. Participants articulated their experiences and perspectives, highlighting their marginalization. Their voting rights are often controlled by male family members, leaving them unaware of the choices available to them in the electoral process. A participant noted that women experience marginalization in politics, as their political rights are overlooked. They are often not consulted regarding their preferences, excluded from processions and meetings, and lack access to local gatherings that are available to men. This creates a politically marginalized environment for women (Irshad, 37).

4. Conclusion

Patriarchy not only impacts the institutions of society, but it also affects women individually. The long-standing practice of patriarchy contributes to this. This has resulted in women's marginalization, preventing them from exercising and expressing their political rights and responsibilities. Political indoctrination has resulted in women finding politics the least appealing subject. We must educate women about their political rights and mobilize them to actively participate in the political arena. We must formulate strategies to enhance women's socio-economic status, enabling them to utilize their political rights instead of relying on men for their daily needs, thereby overcoming economic dominance. We must empower women to comprehend and acquire the skills of political decision-making, thereby directly addressing their limited involvement in political initiatives.

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