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Women And Local Government

Saba Gul Khattak

Decentralization is connected with the empowerment of local government and democractic governance in the popular imagination. Although the virtues and shortcomings of decentralization have been debated extensively, this paper argues that most issues connected with decentralization both as an academic exercise and as a process are overwhelmingly concerned with non-gendered aspects of the phenomenon. It advocates the inclusion of women in local councils as a means of addressing women's needs and concerns and provides specific recommendations in this regard. It concludes by emphasizing that the manner in which the processes of inclusion are implemented are important for any modifications in the institutional arrangements in place in Pakistan at present. The paper is accordingly divided into four parts: the first deals with the conceptualization of decentralization, the need for effective self-government; the second part reviews the histories of local government and discusses issues of identity and state formation and their subsequent impact upon local government and the continued absence of women; the third part touches upon a comparison with India, and a set of recommendations for Pakistan emphasizing the need to go beyond the traditional system of reserved seats; the fourth part concludes that decentralization and good governance hinge upon bringing women into the mainstream rather than keeping them on the periphery.

Theoretical Issues

Decentralization is currently addressed in the context of its centrality to good governance. Discussions on it usually explore the grounds for its popularity as well as the meanings attached to the concept. This section highlights the absence of women from the debate and provides the reasons for and implications of this absence. The purpose is not only to argue for women's visibility but to bring forth a more sophisticated understanding of the issues involved in order to arrive at effective strategies for women's meaningful participation.

Decentralization is defined and described in several ways. Here, I discuss three conventional and fairly representative understandings of the concept to highlight the fact that gender as a category is ignored in all three discussions. The absence of gender can be marked in an overwhelming majority of texts and discussions on decentralization; in that sense then, the three authors that I discuss are not the exceptions. Furthermore, if gender were added to these discussions, a vastly different analyses and set of recommendations would emerge.

First, Tariq Banuri analyzes decentralization in two contexts: bureaucratic and political decentralization. The first refers to bureaucratic delegation of authority to local officials while the second to reform of political structures to transfer financial, administrative and legislative functions to locally elected officials (Banuri 1992, 4). He elaborates that decentralization is increasingly being seen as an essential ingredient in the construction of the good society by a growing number of Pakistan's top policy- makers, politicians as well as technocrats but fails to look into the make-up of locally elected officials. His analysis is incomplete as it is restricted to issues of decentralization sans a gender context. Therefore, the recommendations that emerge do not address the crucial issue of integrating women into decentralized structures.

Second, the World Bank views (1992 20-22) decentralization as an important tool for efficient and effective public sector services as well as the use and control of resources. It distinguishes it from formal political processes and links it with the delivery of services; it considers political liberalization and macroeconomic adjustment to be closely linked with public sector decentralization. Discussing its advantages and disadvantages, Bank analysts say that "In theory, it can lead to significant improvements in efficiency and effectiveness by reducing overloading of central government functions and improving access to decision-making and participation at lower levels of government, for example, by improved service design, user financing targeting, and delivery." On the other hand, these analysts point out that "If not carefully managed, however, decentralization can lead to a deterioration in the use and control of resources, especially in the short term. National goals can be seriously distorted by local governments, and scarce resources can be diverted to poor uses. Moreover, radical decentralization can seriously weaken the capacity of the central government to manage the economy through fiscal and monetary means." Although the Bank addresses the issue in a comprehensive manner from an economic development and management perspective, it fails to raise any issue or concern about the inclusion of women to make the whole process more participatory, representative and effective.

Third, the UNDP 1993 Report on Human Development states that decentralization can be horizontal (dispersion of powers among institutions at the same level) or vertical (powers delegated from the central government to lower tiers of authority). Vertical decentralization consists of three components, namely, deconcentration, delegation and devolution. The first refers to the administration where control goes from the center to the lower levels, the second refers to the market, i.e., to the spinning off of the functions of government to autonomous or semiautonomous structures, e.g., privatization; and the third refers to delegation of political authority (UNDP 1993, 66-67). To this list, Banuri (1996, 2) adds a fourth element: participation and asserts that decentralization with or without participation can have very different outcomes. One may regard the UNDP's classification of decentralization as the most thorough, yet this classification along with Banuri's caveat omits gender.

Decentralization, based on the general views cited above, emerges as a concern encompassing all the important functions of government ranging from representative democracy to sound economic management and administrative efficiency at the grassroots level. The debate is primarily concerned with questions of polity and civic issues as well as economic and social development. This literature, like the majority of social science analysis, envisions decentralization and local communities in non-gendered contexts. Despite the present ascendence of the women in development (WID) and gender and development (GAD) approaches, one does not find even a passing reference to women's presence in these debates. Why is this so? And, why is it important to bring gender into the analysis of decentralization?

One reason for the absence of women from most discussions is institutional inertia (Halliday 1991, 159-160). Although gender issues have made some headway both into academic disciplines, and institutions such as government policy-making and implementing bodies, yet these issues are placed at relatively less important positions. This is compounded by the fact that the domain of practice, e.g., government ministries, is itself a male dominated domain. Thus the gender blindness of various debates is seldom perceived. Furthermore, where it is perceived, it is done in a very elementary manner so that it leads to co-optation rather than a positive move. For instance, in Pakistan, policy-makers, conscious of women's absence, as well as responding to women's demands, reserved a minimal number of seats for women in local government. The few reserved seats make women's presence insignificant while policy-makers can point to their gender sensitivity and support of women's issues.

While institutional inertia can partially explain the absence of women from public debates on decentralization, we need to understand why institutional inertia takes place in the context of gender issues. Implicit in institutional inertia is the public/private dichotomy and the process of constant gendering that takes place. As institutions are part of the state, it would be more practical to look at the state rather than individual institutions.

One may note that analyzing the state and its institutions may be inadequate, especially in its South Asian context where the centrality of the state has been widely challenged by the subaltern group as well scholars such as Iftikhar Ahmed and Ranajit Guha. Ahmed contends that "...the growth of the modern state, specially in the South, has been primarily a violent and coercive process. Furthermore, this coercive rule was integral to the promotion of rule by consent in the North" (Ahmed 1993, 1-2). Thus the development of the state is qualitatively different in the North and the South. Ahmed also points out that the state is not as rooted in South Asia as in the North because the state has not been considered to be the main agent for governance or creating order out of chaos: "Order existed prior to the state which had only the subsidiary role of maintaining it." He contends that the state, taking its cue from the British colonial structure is more peremptory at the top while it is more diffuse at the grass roots. He says that in the Indian context "conflict between the two competing logics of rule, one inherited and understood, the other alien and imposed, remained a dogged obstacle to British hegemony" (ibid, 2). Although Ahmed distinguishes between the different nature and perception of the state in the South and North, certain modernist features of the state are common to both. It is these features that are analyzed by feminists scholars in both the North and the South as masculinist and which are relevant to the present context.

Wendy Brown (1992, 13-14) identifies four different areas in which the masculinist powers of the state are manifest: 1. the juridical-legislative dimension; 2. the capitalist dimension; 3. the prerogative dimension of state power; 4. the bureaucratic dimension of the state. Brown explains that the first encompasses the state's formal constitutional aspects--and the status of women therein. This aspect is central to Catherine MacKinnon and Carole Pateman's theorization of the state's masculinism and the subsequent inequality of women. The second area, the capitalist dimension of the state is concerned with capitalism's bases in private property as well as involvement in the processes of production, distribution, consumption and legitimation which make men earn wages and reserve women for reproductive work overtly, but makes them perform both paid and unpaid work now. Feminist literature from writers such as Zillah Eisenstein and Michele Barrett has analyzed aspects of masculine privilege inscribed in this dimension of the state. The third area, the prerogative dimension of the state is concerned with the qualities that go into the making of a state, i.e., legitimate arbitrary power in policy-making and legitimate monopoly over internal and external violence through its police and military. Feminist scholars such as Jean Bethke Elshtain, Cynthia Enloe, Carol Cohn, Ann Tickner, Spike V. Peterson, Rebecca Grant and Kathleen Newland see this aspect of state power to be a reflection of state masculinity. The fourth dimension, i.e., the bureaucracy, is analyzed in the context of its hierachalism, and proceduralism. Theorized by Weber and Foucault, its feminist critique has been carried out by Kathy Ferguson who argues that bureaucracy produces a dual process; it creates feminized subjects and it excludes or colonizes female subjects. She explains by quoting Ferguson that bureaucratic staff and clientele is rendered submissive and dependent by following strategies of management that "protect them from the worst aspects of domination while simultaneously perpetuating that domination." Further, Ferguson relies upon Gilligan, Chodorow, Hartsock who have identified values of abstract rationality, formal proceduralism, rights-orientation and hierarchy as socially male while identifying substantive rationality, need-based decision-making, relationality, and responsibility as socially female values (1992, 26).

Without going into further detail at present, we can safely assert that women have had to contend with a masculinist state at two levels: directly, e.g., the laws, and indirectly, through ideas of association with the private sphere which are upheld by different policy discourses and traditions. For example, earlier on (1994, 26-27) I have noted the role of the Pakistani state in reinforcing patriarchal norms in the processes of social change. An analysis of various policy discourses reveals the manner in which policy formulation and implementation create and maintain gendered divisions. Certain laws, such as the Law of Evidence, Diyat (blood money) and Qisas (retribution) hold women to be inferior to men and give them half the status of a man. Other policies indirectly bolster women's role, e.g. government-run vocational training institutes generally prepare women as nurses and secretaries or teach them sewing and embroidery while training men as mechanics and repairmen. This augments the traditional roles of women as connected with the household and the private sphere and men with the outside world, the public sphere.

The education system in Pakistan also contributes heavily to further this understanding of social reality. On the one hand the curricula usually presents women in their traditional roles of mother and housewife and on the other if they are discussed in any other context, it is in male terms. Robina Saigol demonstrates this well; writing about the social studies curricula she points out that Hazrat Fatima, daughter of Hazrat Mohammad (pbuh), is depicted as a wonderful mother, a glorified housekeeper, a praiseworthy daughter and concludes that "...the roles of nurturer, mother, housekeeper, helper and supporter are eulogised in sharp contrast to the roles of the Khulfa-e-Rashideen, Imam Hussain and Mohammad Bin Qasim and Mahmud Ghazni where the virtues are bravery, valour, strength, a warlike mentality, conquest and domination. The dimensions along which men are judged are power and strength" (1994, 60). She also points out that Razia Sultana is the only Muslim (woman) ruler who defies any fixed category. Historians glorify her strength, power and warrior virtures and her construction is the masculine Muslim self. On the other hand Queen Nur Jehan, emperor Jehangir's wife, is controversial as she is considered to be the powerful queen of a weak king who is simultaneously involved in intrigue, trickery and conspiracies (ibid, 61). Such readings augment women's place in the home and men's in rule and conquest. If women's role changes, she is either made into an honorary male or is painted as scheming and conniving. Thus, present day perceptions of state responsibility and democracy are based on constructions of social reality that assume the presence of women but where the subtext constantly negates women and female values.

Most thinking and writing takes place in contexts that deny gender inequality at the overt level. Feminist scholars have pointed out the differences and inequalities subsequent upon women's and men's association with the private and public spheres respectively. They assert that a particular construction of masculinity has informed western philosophical discourse from Socrates and Plato to Freud to the present; this discourse forms the basis of the terms of citizenship. According to Luce Irigary, in the context of the public sphere, the subject historically has always been male (1985, 84), i.e., the assumptions indicate that the subject is ontologically conceptualized as male. Furthermore, Rebecca Grant quoting Philip Windsor, connects the banishing by Socrates of his wife so he could discourse with his intellectual male companions before he took his cup of hemlock to mean that "Socrates assumed that the private sphere of women and the family had nothing to do with the public sphere of Man and intellect." The public/private split has condemned women to a position set apart from the progress that men might make toward the advancement of political society (1991, 12). In this discourse, the abstract individual constituted and addressed by liberal political and legal codes is masculine not only because his domain of operations is civil society rather than the family but also because he is presumed to be morally oriented toward autonomy, autarky and individual power. Furthermore, when it comes to the private realm--the realm in which women are responsible for primary labor in return for which they achieve identity inside the family--the state takes a very different view. In this realm state interference is minimal with certain consequences for women.

Although the private realm is reserved for women, a dual circulation of power resides in this context. Here, men are granted control over women and their labor by the state. Thus even as this sphere privileges some female values and gives women some power, it also subordinates women to men. This is the realm which is kept separate from the public sphere of politics. The question of women's participation in local politics is thus in direct contradiction to male perceptions of a woman's place. Although such thinking has been challenged extensively, its basis lies in deep rooted conceptions that are upheld by legal codes, by local traditions, customary practices, by state discourses and state powers--all embedded in patriarchy. These perceptions have a direct bearing on the present paper in that women's participation in public/political affairs is not only discouraged by male members of society but also by the state and its structures. This also explains the inertia that is often experienced when changes are proposed to legislators and policy makers.

Mona Harrington asserts that groups with virtually no political influence and little hope of gaining it do not tend to identify strongly with the nation or with politics generally. Citing Christine Sylvester she points out that "some groups (she refers to specific groups of women in African societies) are so completely disconnected from state functions that they effectively "exit the state"--live as if they were not citizens of the state at all" (1992, 70-71). An analysis of the state, state powers as well as the manifestation of that power in different realms demonstrates that it alienates women. In Pakistan, women's absence from and almost total non-participation in day-to-day mainstream conventional politics, women's lack of protest at the mass level over issues directly linked to their legal status indicates an apathy which results from a self-perception of powerlessness. This self-perception is not the result of under-confidence but of intricate and multi-faceted processes in both the private and public arena which collude to keep women invisible.

The process of "exiting the state" can also be described as the absence of a sense of ownership toward the community, or what Tariq Banuri and Frank Amalric (1992, 1-6) call the process of deresponsibilization. It is a systematic process of exclusion whereby people do not relate to important decisions concerning the larger community as priorities. Deresponsibilization is defined as the erosion of concern for public matters; it consists of four main elements in Pakistan: creation of uncertainty, powerlessness, disembededness and the contradiction between needs and responsibility (1992, 1-6). One may note that Banuri and Amalric discuss deresponsibilization in a non-gendered context by talking about people and local communities, as if men and women are equally active or inactive in the realm of public policy and politics. In the context of women, while one can assert that at one level "erosion" (as traditionally understood) of a concern for public matters for women has not really taken place because historically their overt involvement in these matters has been kept minimal/restricted, and therefore, the question of erosion is almost irrelevant in this context, at another level one can argue for the process of continuous erosion in the contexts of increased powerlessness and disembededness. The process of state development in Pakistan has left women far more disembeded as a result of the pursuit of large-scale development projects, increasingly bureaucratized ways of conceptualizing, managing and implementing policies as well as the existence of a blatantly discriminatory juridical-legal system.

The institutions of government which have evolved do not necessarily assure good governance if one makes gender a central concern. As mentioned above, state institutions alienate. The alienation that results from the bureaucratic management of society is not necessarily alleviated by replacing these institutions with another set of equally alien institutions, but lies in the *process* of inclusion and involvement of communities in self-governance and that of the community with the larger society/nation. A re-examination of the relationship that (gendered) communities have to institutions is necessary. These institutions have to be re-appropriated on the basis of a new relationship established through the process

of relocating them in new practices that include women in meaningful ways, and in fact, where women need to be involved in the process of reappropriation.

This section thus concludes by reasserting that historically women have been kept out of the public sphere which relates to polis and the polity. Western philosophical discourse, the basis of our present day arrangement of civic life, privileges men ontologically because it addresses itself to a male rather than female subject. Additionally, state institutions, the state's nature and capitalism's demands make it imperative that values associated with men continue to be privileged while marginalizing women and the values associated with them.

Local Government Discourse in Pakistan

This section provides an overview of the history of local government institutions. In doing so, it provides two types of interpretation of the historical development of local government in Pakistan. In the first instance, local government is related and located in ancient India with an emphasis on the Indian cultural milieu. In the second instance, authors relate the traditions of local government in India to Muslim civilizations in Baghdad and Egypt. They try to create a continuity of history by linking and identifying with a Muslim past from western Asia rather than a Hindu past in South Asia. The latter has been directly and tacitly encouraged by various governments in Pakistan in different policy contexts. This need for a separate identity from India has also led to a different kind of post-independence history of local government in the two countries. The role women in local government is thus considered extraneous to such a construction of history. Conceptualized in masculinist terms of state rivalry and survival and masculinist mainstream politics, women were not able to emerge as a major category in any debate or narratives of local government. The process of the construction of the meta narrative has not allowed any space for the women question to emerge. This space has been completely colonized by a Hobbesian perception of the state system at the immediate level and the total disconnectedness of women from local government in the popular mindset. The discursive space simply has not existed.

The history of local government in Pakistan is traced back to its Indian-Hindu past by writers who like to follow Indologists. Taj Moharram (1996, 1-4) traces it to the panchayat system which he says was taken to mean a gathering of village leaders for the purpose of arriving at decisions. Panchayat, literally meaning council of five, he says was not a formal body with present-day formal statutory powers. Also, bigger villages could have more than one panchayat. He explores the different forms of village organization, citing examples from the Rig-Vedas, Kautilya and Yajnavalkya. He discusses the historical continuity of the Indian rural social structures from Rig-Vedic times by mentioning that every village unit had "its Sabha (Council of Elders) and Gramani (Headman) was a self-governing unit. It was... the traditional panchayat (Council of Elders) which, during the greater part of the period, seems to had [sic] been the normal instrument of village administration."

Furthermore, Moharram (ibid, 3) quotes George Birdwood: "India has undergone more religious and political revolutions than any other country in the world. But the village communities remain in full municipal vigour all over the peninsula. Scythians, Greek, Saracen, Afghan, Mongols and Maratha have come down from its mountains and Portuguese, Dutch, English, French and Dane up out of its seas and set up their successive dominations in the land; but village communities have remained as little affected by their coming and going as a rock by the rising and falling of the tide." Moharram goes on to describe the changes under the British and independent Pakistan which are not the focus at present.

In contrast, Masood ul Hasan (n.d. 1985?, 7-8) traces the history of local government in Pakistan to Harappa and Moenjodaro and connects it with Iraq and Egypt as centers of Muslim rule. He looks at the history of the city under different Muslim dynasties, highlighting the fact that they were the first to introduce water supply to individual homes, public baths and street lights, libraries, and systems of waste disposal. He describes the system of administration under the Mughals in India, asserting that walled towns with a market in the center were built by them. Streets were paved with drainage systems running through them as well as a system of wells in cities. Each town was divided into well defined wards to which a maktib and mosque were attached. He provides a brief description of the different functionaries in a city: every ward or Mohalla had a Mir Mohalla who was the spokesperson of the ward; the municipal functions were the responsibility of the Kotwal, the Kazi and the Mohtasib. Every village was represented by a Mir Deh while a group of villages were represented by a Chaudhry. The pointed use of Muslim titles and of Muslim architecture and belief system serves to delineate the obsession to distance Muslim Pakistan from India's predominantly Hindu past. The question of women under the circumstances does not and cannot emerge as a relevant concern.

In more or less the same vein Muhammad Afzal (1985, 3), writing about the historical aspects of local government in Pakistan, depicts a golden past in which people "were united though bonds of community loyalties. They shared their joys and sorrows and formed a cohesive social order." Although he mentions the panchayats, he does not elaborate on them and carefully omits any mention of Buddhist or Hindu influence even though he refers to Taxila, Harrapa and Moenjodaro. The Muslim period, specifically under the Mughals, is given considerably more attention as are the changes introduced by the British. If someone unfamiliar with South Asia were to read this description, they would not know that the area had cultural traditions stemming from Buddhism and Hinduism and a predominantly Hindu population. Such deliberate distancing was strategically deployed by a desire to deny the existence of a particular past. As pointed out earlier, this discourse does not allow women in.

The tendency to identify with western asia rather than south asia has been manifest in Pakistan since its inception. It was primarily motivated by the need to justify its being. The majority of Pakistani political leaders and policy-makers had opted for the partition of India and hence distanced the country from its Indian past by emphasizing its Muslim identity. This, at a crude level, meant anti-Hinduism and a rejection of indigenous traditions related to the subcontinent. Combined with the question of carving out an identity based on difference and otherness were two other major interconnected factors. First, the coupling of modernization and westernization with success; second, the ascendancy of the civil and military bureaucracies and their style of management in government. Many political thinkers and reformers starting with Sir Syed Ahmed Khan considered that the status of Muslims as a community was directly linked to their resistance to learn the English language and the sciences. The colonizers attributed their right to rule due to their superior morals and knowledge. This carried over into Pakistani policy-makers mindsets. The domination of the state system by the bureaucracy has also been extensively documented in the writings of Hamza Alavi, Khalid Bin Sayeed etc. Thus, initially, the Pakistani state undertook to modernize itself by aping the west and later looked toward the middle east for historical continuity of identity. This required a rejection of Indian-ness. The state also justified centralized rule under the self-serving presumption of combating India. The absence of women from any body of government was considered inconsequential given the "larger" and more important questions of state insecurity and identity.

The concerns outlined above also had implications for local self-government. While Gandhi in India, personifying Indian/Hindu nationalism in the Pakistani mindset, advocated panchayati raj, Pakistan took a totally different course. Concerned with issues of identity and survival, its leaders felt that a strong state

with a centralized powerful government were needed in Pakistan. This was in sync with their conception of rational bureaucratic management rather than leaving government to local communities which they held in low esteem, connected as they were with indigenism, ignorance and superstition. Furthermore, the Muslim League, the ruling party, also did not trust its own power where local communities were concerned, especially in the Punjab where the Union Party was powerful and in the NWFP where the Congress was powerful at the grassroots level. One may thus conclude that the conscious and deliberate effort to develop a strong state necessarily impacted local self government.

These trends also explain why Pakistan has a chequered history of local government. Ironically, local government has thrived only under periods of martial law or authoritarian rule. It has faded from public attention with the onset of democracy. Although many scholars have pointed out the connections between marital law and relative boom in local government, they have failed to perceive the direct connection between centralized authoritarian rule, the reign of misogynist ideologies and the absence of women. During these periods women were pushed out of the public sphere and there was an attempt to put them back into the private sphere--the home. Given such an atmosphere, the emergence of any issue pertaining to increased visibility of women in government or in the public arena was impossible. For example, under the Ayub and later the Zia regime, the question of women's entry into politics was debated by the clergy at the regimes' behest. Both Field Marshall Ayub Khan and General Zia ul Haq tried to put women out of the race for public office. While General Ayub's regime displayed contradictory trends in its treatment of women, i.e., on the one hand it passed the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance of 1961 on the other hand it tried to persuade the mullahs to issue a fatwa (religious verdict) against women contesting for the highest political office, the Zia regime had no qualms about trying to put women behind the "chaddar and chardivari" (the veil and the four walls of the house) through official circulars and the state controlled media. With regard to the Family Laws Ordinance, it should be pointed out that although the state introduced it under pressure, and it was considered to be progressive legislation at the time in the context of the family, it pertained to the private realm. The state did not by any means provide women with increased access to the public sphere. Thus one may easily conclude that while the state encouraged local government during authoritarian periods, this did not translate into increased women's participation in the public sphere. In fact, the authoritarian regimes have actively obstructed women in this sphere. Thus, even during the periods that local government thrived, women were hindered from entering the realm of politics.

The narratives on local government in Pakistan usually list the different initiatives, beginning with the 1953 US-sponsored Village Agricultural and Industrial Development Program (Village AID) which involved rural communities in decision-making. Village AID focused on roads, schools, dispensaries, sanitation, adult education, women and youth programs. It was only partially successful in the area of road building.The other major initiatives that are usually referred to are President Ayub Khan's system of Basic Democracies and the Rural Works Program, Z.A. Bhutto's People's Local Government followed by Local Government under Zia ul Haq. Local government, it is generally concluded was most effective under Ayub Khan and Zia ul Haq because these two figures needed legitimacy in the absence of popularly elected assemblies.

The combination of political expediency with a government-sponsored national ideology which depended upon a centralized definition of identity, helped create conditions that made local government ineffective and powerless. Women, who were not associated with the public domain, have not been considered to be the victims of neutral state policies that did not favor local government. They have thus been ignored as a category worth discussion in most histories of local government.

The rare and unintended occasion on which women are mentioned in ny context is in Tariq Banuri's paper on democratic decentralization (1992, 16). Quoting from Zamora (1990) who quotes from the report of a Select Committee of the House of Commons in 1812, he gives a list of functionaries in a Madras village:

1. The headman---who supervises village affairs, settles disputes, supervises the police and collects revenues within his village.
2. The accountant---who keeps accounts of cultivation and registers everything connected with it.
3. The watchmen---of two kinds: the superior and the inferior. Superior watchmen gather information about crimes and offenses and escort and protect persons who go to other villages. Inferior watchmen guard crops and assist in measuring them within the village.
4. The boundary-man---who preserves village limits or gives evidence respecting them in cases of conflict.
5. The superintendent of tanks and water-courses---who distributes water for agriculture.
6. The priest---who performs village worship.
7. The schoolmaster---who teaches children to read and write in the sand.
8. The astrologer---who proclaims lucky or unpropitious periods for sowing and threshing.
9. The smith and carpenter---who manufactures agricultural implements and builds dwellings of ryot.

10-16. The potter, washerman, barber, cowkeeper, doctor, *dancing girl* [emphasis mine], musician poet.

Women's presence as "dancing girls" is mentioned at the end of a long list of the different people and professions who were present in self-contained towns. Beyond this, the histories of local government do not concern themselves with the question of women. This is obviously the case since women are seldom associated with the public domain, especially the management of community affairs. While exceptions exist, e.g., there have been some behind the scenes powerful queens in the subcontinent from amongst the Mughals, they were the exceptions rather than the rule. Women as a category have not been assumed to have the requisite knowledge of politics, administration and finances for running community affairs.

Women's Representation in Local Government

This section provides a brief comparison of India and Pakistan with regard to women's representation at the local government level. The purpose is to elaborate on the possibilities in the region, learn lessons and underscore the fact that despite the constraints and similar patriarchal conditions, women have been able to achieve much more in India than in Pakistan. This section also outlines the issue women's (minimal) representation in local government in Pakistan by looking at the specific case of the NWFP.

The participation of women in government is a function of their general socio-political status. It is not a problem or a matter at the local level only and cannot be tackled at that level alone. In fact, women's participation in local politics may be a product of filter-down effect of their emancipation at the national/provincial level. The existence of role models, such as Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto and Begum Nasim Wali Khan who is the leader of opposition in the NWFP, provides encouragement to women. It may be pointed out here that the prior mobilization and roles of women in nationalist and social welfare movements also provide precedents to women to enter politics. However, most women who are political leaders at the national or provincial level have achieved their position due to their (upper) class background where women's participation in politics or public life is now acceptable. Participation at the provincial or national level cuts across geographical limits. On the other hand, women attempting to participate in local politics will have to appeal for support to a limited geographical area across class lines. As such, they will have to deal with those sections of the electorate which do not

approve/accept/condone women's role in public life, let alone politics. To this one may add the fact that it becomes difficult for well-placed families in rural areas to allow their women to participate in local politics precisely because they will have to interact with people from all classes and ask for their vote. In contrast, women contesting elections or holding office at the provincial or national levels do not interact directly with men from all class backgrounds but with those who are close to their own class. Thus, aside from legal and policy issues, issues of class affect women's participation at the local level.

Compared to Pakistan, India's post-1947 history of local government has continuity whether under Congress or non-Congress rule at the center or the states even though elections have at times been postponed or held irregularly. The emphasis on panchayats began with Gandhi who had in mind the village panchayats of ancient India through which the will of the people was exercised. Panchayats are elected for a five-year term and the system generally has three tiers: the village, the intermediate and the district levels (Times of India 1989). Under Rajiv Gandhi, however, the panchayat system was revived considerably, especially wary in the context of women. The Indian government, through a constitutional amendment in 1989, reserved one-third seats for women (National Commission for Women 1996, 15) in panchayats at all levels. It also reserved seats for scheduled castes, thirty per cent of which were reserved for women from scheduled castes. Additionally, the government made it mandatory upon state legislatures to ensure reservation (Hindustan Times, 1989). In contrast, Pakistan's constitution does not make it mandatory upon provincial governments to ensure reservation of seats for women at ALL levels of local government. Although provinces are required to give women some minimal representation, they can decide this at their own discretion. We will come back to this point in the NWFP context later.

Women in India are directly elected and not nominated to panchayats. This enables them to be elected as chairpersons and also, in South India, there are instances of all-women (popularly elected) panchayats. On the other hand, in Pakistan, the indirect system of women's election ensures that no women can be the chairpersons of local councils. This is an example of barely veiled structural discrimination against women.

A popular belief was that with the high rate of illiteracy women would not be able to participate effectively in local self-government, however, these have been proven wrong as in the case of India. In fact, the presence, in India, of all-women popularly elected panchayats running their affairs effectively proves that women are capable of taking charge. This does not mean that there are no problems in India. Indian women have complained that they are often called to meetings of a panchayat only when the quorum was incomplete or to put their signature on documents, and that they often do not have the financial resources to monitor programs for women and children which the panchayats have undertaken. However, a federation of women from local bodies has been formed to serve as a platform for sharing experiences and the problems women face in villages. There were suggestions that resolutions passed by a panchayat in the absence of women members should not be accepted and that women councilors should be entrusted with implementing programs for women and children. Compared to this, the case of Pakistan is quite different.

In Pakistan, Article 32 of the 1973 Constitution states that the state "shall encourage local government institutions, composed of elected representatives of the area concerned, and in such institutions special representation will be given to peasants, workers, and women." Although the central government has mentioned local government, this tier of government is considered to be a provincial subject. Thus, local government legislation is laid out by provincial governments. The governments of the Punjab, Sindh and NWFP passed their respective Local Government Ordinances in 1979 while the Balochistan Government passed its Local Government Ordinance in 1980. Except for the Punjab which expressly provides for

reserved seats for women at all levels of local government, the other three provincial ordinances are vague on the issue by stating that this will be decided by the provincial government through a notification (Ministry of Local Government, GoP 1994, 19, 169, 359, 513). However, with the exception of the NWFP, the other provincial governments through notification give women two reserved seats at the Union Council level and two seats or the equivalent of ten percent representation at the higher levels such as in District Councils and going on to Municipal Committees and Corporations.

Table 1: Number & Percentage of Women Members in Local Government in 1990

Province	Female Members	Total Members	% of Women
Balochistan	840	5171	16%
N.W.F.P.	82	6189	1.32%
Punjab	5588	50343	11%
Sindh	1736	13853	12%

Source: Farzana Bari quoting Secretary, Local Government, Islamabad Office.

The NWFP government pursues a different policy when it comes to women's representation at the Union Council level. While the other provinces adhere to the ten percent rule of reserved seats, the NWFP does not do so with the result that women are represented only at the District Council with two seats. This, combined with a rather crude system of reserved seats creates many gaps in the system of government. Even though women are present in district and urban councils, because they are indirectly elected, they do not have the same authority, financial clout and voice on the councils as the male representatives. Furthermore, because of the present system, local bodies will almost always have chairMEN rather than chairpersons. This is because women are nominated and elected by male councillors. This prevents them from having any ambitions of becoming the chairperson. The NWFP government's policy of excluding women by not keeping any reserved seats for them at the lowest level of local government, the union council, does not only result in an appalling profile of the province where gender is concerned, but also results in deresponsibilization of women.

Women's Structural Problems and Deresponsibilization

This section, based on interviews with women councilors in the NWFP, highlights their problems which are a result of the structure of local government and the state on the one hand and the cultural practices that feed into a misogynist ideology on the other hand. The specific oppressions women face are quite different in character to those of men. The instances of frustration and relative powerlessness experienced by women feed into women's deresponsibilization or exiting the state. The examples that follow demonstrate the different contexts in which women's deresponsibilization takes place. Though not exhaustive, they are good indicators of how structural problems combined with inaccessibility to resources induce women's exit from the public arena.

The problems women confront on local bodies vary; however, they have the same result, i.e., they make the position of women weak. In fact, women are often assertive and weak at the same time. More assertive women councilors are more dissatisfied both with the powers of councils vis-a-vis the provincial government and its line departments as well as with the male council members. The main source of women councillors' weakness lies in the method of their election to the Councils. Since they depend upon the support of male councillors they are thus obliged to support them in almost all matters. Because the male members are astute politicians with long years of exposure and experience, women do not know where they stand with them and are weary of how the male members vote. Given this situation, women's

participation is kept low which then feeds into the perception that they are inactive and do not understand public affairs.

Women's indirect method of election does not entitle them to represent any particular ward or locality. Therefore, hey cannot speak on behalf of a well-defined constituency. The women they represent also belong to wards which men represent and because male councilors have more influence, people (including women) depend more upon the male council members than upon women. Additionally, it is simply assumed that women council members represent women and their interests. Legally, women are elected expressly because they are women; not because they will represent women's interests. This further distances them from active participation in council and thus community affairs.

Women councilors also expressed dissatisfaction with the fact that the chairman of a council has a pivotal role in cases concerning second marriage and divorce. This role was ensured to Council Chairmen by the Ayub regime through the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance of 1961 (mentioned before). This Ordinance, considered progressive at the time, laid out that if a man wanted to contract a second marriage (polygamy) he would seek the permission of the chairman in case permission was not forthcoming from the current wife/wives. Further, that all marriage and divorce deeds must be registered with the local council. Thus, local councils were given an important community function. Additionally, some male councilors also pointed out that the Union Council often acted as a jirga, deciding tricky cases, e.g. whose daughter or sister will get married to who. Both male and female councilors acknowledged that women must be included in these decisions. Also, men tend to take a more benevolent view of domestic violence whereas women are more supportive of women. Women councilors felt that if they had more powers, they would be able to intervene in these areas effectively on behalf of women. Thus women's traditional role with regard to arranging marriages and acting as arbiters was taken over by the state without the assignment of any other role. Their power and functions were thus circumscribed.

In the case of urban councils many widows have problems related to property tax or scholarships for their children. They feel far more comfortable going to a female councilor with an appeal for waiver of the tax or request for scholarship than to a male councilor which involves certain social taboos. Similarly, urban women expressed frustration with regard to sports. The local councils do not deem women's sports important while they give attention to men's sports such as cricket, hockey, football etc. They said that despite repeated requests, the councils always managed to "forget" their requests. Ironically, men sometimes make women councilors their team managers for reasons of funds and donations.

Additionally, given the tacit collusion of patriarchy with state institutions through the ideology of male supremacy, women in rural areas do not have control over their own earnings. An incident will demonstrate this amply: when a woman councillor visited the women's section of a local jail, a prisoner came up to her and requested in confidence to keep some of her savings in a bank in her (the councilor's) name. She specified this because she feared that her husband and sons would access the money if a bank account was opened in her name. This is not an unusual phenomenon; it is a widely accepted practice among bank employees and managers in rural and sometimes even urban areas. If women have representatives to whom they can resort at the village rather than district level, such problems of utter powerlessness and consequent alienation might decrease.

Women councilors are usually expected to take responsibility for girls' education and vocational training--major areas of concern for them. The women councilors' relative powerlessness in this regard, brought about by the scarce resources at their disposal, makes their disillusionment with politics complete. Financial constraints had a large part to play in this; women's share of the meager local council's budget

varied between 2-5 percent. This was insufficient for them to take any effective steps in either direction. Even if vocational training centers were established by the government, the salary of the teachers employed at these centers is so little that it cannot even pay for their transport expenses. Thus, there are both financial (women councilor's percentage share) and structural (low finances to begin with) problems that women have to contend with. The "failure" that results is often ascribed to women's non-interest or inability to run these programs efficiently.

Recommendations

Having established the fact that women's representation is needed on local bodies, not only because they constitute half the population, but because the problems and oppressions they face are sometimes quite different in character to those of men, we can discuss how to make them effective. This discussion can be divided into two parts. The first dealing with structural measures that will ensure that the system includes them, not nominally but effectively; and a second set of recommendations that involve advocacy related recommendations which will make the quality of women's presence on local bodies better in terms of gender-sensitive and supportive policies.

Structural Changes

Center-Province-Local Bodies Relations

Local government is considered to be ineffective. To make it strong, its members should be empowered. Usually problems arise when different political parties rule the center and provinces. To make local government strong, firstly, the legal power of the chief minister to dismiss local government should be removed. Additionally, local government should be directly recognized as a constitutional entity (Bengali 1995, 3). Secondly, the chief minister and members of provincial assemblies should not have any shares in the total budget for their constituencies; these should be at the disposal of the ministry of local government. At present the lion's share goes to the chief ministers, MNAs, senators, and MPAs. Thirdly, the provincial government's line departments and federal government agencies are responsible for delivering civic services directly just as (in theory) are the local bodies. However, the former have effective authority and responsibility and funds for carrying out their mandates whereas the latter do not (Bengali 1995, 4). Obviously, this should be changed to a fairer arrangement.

Reserved Seats

Increase in quota

At present, women in the Punjab, Balochistan and Sindh have 2 seats or 10 percent seats in local government while the NWFP government reserves only 2 seats in every district council. This should be uniformly increased to fifty percent irrespective of rural urban divides or provincial variations.

Method of election

To make women's voices stronger, we have to go beyond nominations. We propose that their participation be ensured by reserving certain wards for them to represent. This will help the majority of women who cannot contest direct/open elections either due to the non-availability of financial resources (political parties will now be willing to back them) or societal approval. In this connection, fifty percent wards, on a rotation basis, can be declared to be solely for women, i.e., only women can contest elections there. This will be on a joint electorate basis, i.e, both women and men will vote for the female candidates in all-women wards.

Role of political parties

The major political parties of the country are silent about their position on women's role and representation in local bodies. Political parties should be legally required to give a percentage of party-tickets to women candidates. They will be persuaded and interested in doing so when particular wards are reserved for women.

Chairpersons

If women constitute fifty percent of local councils, automatically, they will also stand a chance of becoming the chairpersons of councils or corporations. However, before this happens, we suggest that the government also introduce legislation that requires two chairpersons, a male and a female. This will help divide power equally and ensure that the female councilors do not feel powerless. Additionally and equally importantly, the female chairpersons would have advisory powers in the cases of marriage, divorce and permission for a second wife to a man.

Increased Financial Share

Although all councilors complain that the total budget of their council is extremely inadequate for any meaningful development work or social welfare projects to be carried out, their share of 15-16 percent of the budget is still better than that of the women members at the district council level which is between 2 and 5 percent. The logic provided for this disparity is that the women councilors are not directly elected, hence they are assumed not to have a constituency. Simultaneously, the constituency they are supposed to represent, the women of the area, are in fact far greater in number than the total population of any ward or union council. If one goes by this division, one could conclude that the women councilors should have a greater share of the budget than anyone else on the council.

However, if one goes according to the recommendations of this paper, one may advance the view that the share of each councillor be equal and that all projects should clearly delineate the ways in which they help women directly, i.e., all projects should have a gender component at all levels. This will ensure that both male and female councilors allocate their money in a gender sensitive manner. Furthermore, it will raise the awareness of the women in local communities, politicizing them to make demands upon their representatives if their needs are ignored.

Quality Related Measures

Education

Although women at the district council level tend to be literate, this is not necessarily the case at the lower levels. Farzana Bari's study of the Punjab delineates women councilors' inability to read and write with the consequence that they often do not know the contents of the documents they sign (1996, 58). This becomes a constraint in their participation. Although one cannot make literacy a precondition to election since that would debar a large portion of the population, one can insist upon non-formal education programs, especially in rural areas, as a means of enhancing the effectiveness of councilors.

Political Education and Training

Political education here implies a civic sense; it means that councilors should be aware of their powers and be able to deal with provincial and federal agencies to the advantage of their communities rather than to the agencies'. Often male and female councilors lack knowledge of the administrative structure, financial and judicial powers of local bodies. Although the government runs Local Government Training Institutes for councilors, very few councilors know about them or attend them.

Training at these institutes should be widely advertised so that more councilors can take advantage of the programs they offer. Additionally, there should also be follow-up training programs so that councilors have the chance to discuss and perhaps resolve the problems they encounter during their tenure.

Gender Sensitivity Training

The fact that women in positions of power are not very supportive of women and of gender issues has been underscored several times. The biological fact of being a woman is not a sufficient criterion and does not automatically bestow upon women an ability to carry out gender sensitive policies. In fact, given the patriarchal nature of power structures, both women and men need gender sensitivity training to bring about a qualitative change. Men and women need to understand the structural constraints women face as well as the relative neglect of women's problems and consideration of these as unimportant to be able to be supportive and take action.

Legal Literacy

Here, we emphasize laws concerning women especially because this is one area in which women meet with injustice. These laws are largely concerned with marriage and divorce. Given the fact that local councils have some judicial powers and given the fact that chairmen can grant permission to men to remarry, it is imperative that they be aware of the law in a gender sensitive manner. The issues of forced marriages, and child marriages, violations of human rights, are frequently condoned by society and traditions so that if appeals come to the councils in their capacity as (informal) jirgas, matters are usually decided in accordance with male preferences and considerations. In this regard, we have already recommended that women share this power with the chairmen, either as co-chairpersons or as ordinary council members. Often, both women and men are ill-informed about women's legal rights and often make decisions favorable to men rather than women. Cases of domestic abuse and violence are usually treated as unimportant with the victim (the woman) being blamed for inviting the violence or being told to patiently bear the violence. Because the state and patriarchy collude to make women's position within the family insecure, legal literacy which is gender sensitive to women is thus an important tool for ensuring gender sensitive justice and must be given to councilors irrespective of their gender.

Media

The media--print, radio and television--should encourage women's participation in politics by highlighting all the international treaties that the government has signed and ratified with regard to women's empowerment. These range from international human rights, equal rights conventions, and CEDAW to treaties with a particular focus, such as labor laws, or nationality laws. At another level, the need to change attitudes through the media by arranging public awareness campaigns and holding of seminars, debates, public meetings, through folk and art festivals and theater needs to achieved. This is not to ascribe to a police state where strictly regimented propaganda is churned out but to highlight the problems that women's absence from the public arena, especially politics (at all levels) leads to. Additionally, the discriminatory laws which act against women and the chauvinistic interpretation of laws should be challenged publicly and changed.

Expansion of NGOs' Role

NGOs, especially women's NGOs, must expand their role to include political mobilization and mass political education programs. They cannot restrict their work to social welfare or development projects which work within the status quo. To encourage women's participation in the local communities, NGOs must highlight women's political rights and facilitate the entry of women into

politics by educating local communities about the political system and the importance of women's representation therein.

Conclusion

This research asserts that the state has systematically kept women out of the social contract that exists between citizens and the state. Unless women are included in the process of decentralization, and unless they claim their space (which traditionally does not legitimately belong to them), the process of political decentralization will be only partially successful. If the aim of decentralization is the achievement of good governance, it will have to consider the consequences of all-male or almost all-male bodies of governance.

Pakistani women have been missing from the debate on decentralization in almost all contexts. They have only been included as appendages by being given a nominal quota in local government. For all practical purposes their presence is ineffective and hence reaffirms many peoples' belief that women should stay out of politics. The gesture of nominal inclusion actually reinforces the status quo and prevents positive change from transpiring. The elements of class and patriarchal domination continue to oppress women. These practices of domination result in alienation and deresponsibilization.

Deresponsibilization in the context of women takes place in concrete ways. For example, in the context of local politics, women disassociate themselves from policy-making and distance themselves from active participation in decision-making. As political representatives their voice does not carry equal clout to that of their male counterparts, their recommendations are regularly ignored; they are acutely aware of their inability to make even minimal difference due to the insignificant monies allocated to them as their share of the budget. What needs to be underscored here is the fact that deresponsibilization is a *continuous process*. It renews itself in different ways and contexts; it is felt and lived in small every-day experiences. There is no one BIG event that initiates it, rather, it is the continuous experience of powerlessness that triggers it.
This paper also points out the manner in which state structures have kept women out of the public arena. Patriarchal ideology, even when it is weakened by the state in one context, is deliberately strengthened in another. For example, the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance of 1961 denied men the right to remarry without the permission of the first wife. However, it also allowed for the man to seek this permission from the chairman of the local council. Experience has shown that chairmen are more sympathetic towards men than women. Similarly, in cases of divorce, if the wife is seeking to register her divorce, the chairman of the local council can create hurdles in the registration process. State laws and institutions thus provide in-built mechanisms of cooption which help maintain the status quo and keep women marginalized.

The parameters of the debate on decentralization have been framed around issues of identity and state survival. They have not been about the quality or the practitioners of democracy. No one has questioned the restriction of issues to that of Muslim Pakistan versus Hindu India and the consequent perceived need for a strong centralized state. This is a fundamental issue in the debate on decentralization and helps to keep attention away from women. Historically thus, questions about women's presence or absence have been systematically obliterated. Additionally, local bodies' functions have been formalized to a great degree and the traditional areas of women's influence such as negotiating about marriage/divorce and domestic violence etc. have come to be adjudicated by

councils where there are many more men than women and where women's interests are undercut and constantly undermined.

The specific recommendations demand giving women fifty per cent seats on the basis of direct election. The recommendations are also aimed at changing women's and men's perceptions of the very nature of politics. This would imply more than holding formal positions; it would imply politicizing issues in the context of everyday life by interpreting them from a gender sensitive perspective. The recommendations also emphasize structural change within the local bodies so that they do not face financial and legal constraints.

To conclude then, one needs to examine and reevaluate the debate on decentralization at several levels. The first is to look at the omissions in the debate and the politics that lies behind these omissions. Second, to look at deresponsibilization as an on-going process in which women are systemically deresponsibilized through several, not necessarily directly connected, processes. At a third level, one can analyze the manner in which the state circumscribes women's presence in the process by keeping them peripheral to the debate. And fourth, one can offer strategies and recommendations through which to introduce positive change not just in the formal structures, i.e., institutional mechanisms but also at the attitudinal level.

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(2 from rural areas and 2 from urban areas)
3 male Local Bodies representatives in the NWFP
(all from rural areas)

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