

An Introduction to

Women's Parliamentary Caucus

Parliament of
the Islamic Republic of Pakistan

The Caucus Icons —Three Legendary Women:

Mohtarma Fatima Jinnah – 1893-1967

Mohtarma Fatima Jinnah, the youngest sister of the Founder of the Nation Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah and a dentist by profession, emerged as the leading woman voice during the freedom struggle. During this Movement, she rendered innumerable services in organising Muslim women of the Sub-Continent from the platforms of “All India Muslim League’s Women Wing” and “All India Muslim Women Students Organisation” to seek for a separate homeland that would ensure equal rights to all its citizens, without any discrimination of gender, class or creed. While touring the remotest corners of the country, the “brother and sister duo” stood shoulder to shoulder, hence giving a message of “partnership on equal basis” loud and clear. In his book, “Jinnah, Pakistan and Islamic Ideology”, renowned writer and historian Prof. Akbar S. Ahmed records:

“Quaid-e-Azam asked Fatima Jinnah to sit beside him at Sibi Darbar, the grand annual gathering of Baluch and Pakhtun chiefs and leaders. He was making a point: Muslim women must take their place in the history of Pakistan. The Sibi Darbar broke all precedents”

She reached the zenith of her political accomplishments, when towards the end of her life in 1965 she defied tradition and challenged the dictatorship of Field Marshal Ayub Khan by contesting against him as the unanimous candidate of all the opposition parties. Even a conservative party like the Jamaat-i-Islami accepted her as a woman presidential candidate. There is little doubt that the history of Pakistan would have been completely different had the country elected a woman as its President in 1965 — more than two decades before it was finally able to get its first woman Head of the Government in 1988.

Begum Rana Liaqat Ali Khan -1905-1990:

An icon of social mobilization, Begum Rana Liaqat Ali Khan's services in promoting women's emancipation and empowerment will long be remembered. A dedicated and self-less soul, she rose to prominence in 1942, when under the threat of immanent Japanese attack on Indian Sub-Continent, the Quaid-e-Azam instructed her to organise women for Civil Defence and she organised a small voluntary nursing corps. The Quaid advised her:

"Be prepared to train the women. Islam doesn't want women to be shut up and never see fresh air."

Her course for the rest of her life was thus set. In 1947, with independence came the pains and horrors of sectarian riots and mass migrations. In such challenging times, Begum Khan formed women's voluntary groups to serve the humanity in distress, lurking in the refugee camps. In 1949, under her own initiative, she formed "Women National Guards" and "Pakistan Women Naval Reserve" and was appointed as the Chief Controller of both with the rank of a Brigadier. The same year, Begum Rana called the first-ever Conference of women leaders and activists from all walks of life and announced the formation of "All Pakistan Women's Association – APWA". A voluntary and non-political organisation, APWA has rendered tremendous contributions in the social, educational and cultural uplift of women in Pakistan. Begum Rana remained APWA's lifetime President. An ardent supporter of women's education, she patronised the opening of Home Economics Colleges in Karachi and Dhakka. She also encouraged women's entrepreneurship by organising Industrial Homes in the country. The formation of Pakistan's first "Professional and Business Women Club" also owes its existence to the efforts of Begum Rana.

Her meritorious services earned her the coveted "Human Rights Prize" by the US --- the first Muslim woman to receive this honour.

While she also served the nation as its Ambassador to the Netherlands and Italy, she's also the first and the only woman to have served as a Governor of a Province, when she was appointed as Governor Sindh in 1974.

It is thus no wonder that even two decades after her death, she continues to be seen as a symbol of selfless service to the cause of humanity and uplift of women.

Benazir Bhutto — 1953 – 2007

South Asia has long been known for producing towering women leaders. Very few, however, have been credited to change the course of history and leave an impregnable imprint on it for all times to come. Benazir Bhutto--- the eldest child of Pakistan's first directly elected Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto --- surely grew up to stand with only a handful of women leaders, who shaped the global events of the last century. On December 2, 1988, dressed in the national flag colours, as she took oath as the world's youngest, the Muslim World's first and Pakistan's only woman Prime Minister, she symbolised the finer social values of democracy, liberalism, tolerance and hope in a society infested with dictatorial tendencies.

Introduction:

The formation of a non-partisan Women's Parliamentary Caucus (WPC) in the Parliament of Pakistan, under the leadership of Dr. Fehmida Mirza, Honourable Speaker of the National Assembly, is a milestone in the country's parliamentary history and a boost to the cause of women's rights in Pakistan. With its membership open to all women parliamentarians, today it has in its fold some 90 legislators out of a total of 76 women Members of the National Assembly and 17 women Senators. The Members take keen interest in the proceedings of the Caucus which has enabled this rather young forum to mature in an exceptionally short time.

The genesis of WPC's formation can rightly be traced back to the heroic struggle of Pakistani women in pursuit of their legal, political and social rights. So strong and effective was this movement that in the country's 62 years of history, it often altered the course of the nation's political journey, when women leaders emerged as the most popular voices of the oppressed, down-trodden and the marginalised majority of Pakistan. The fact that against the three longest military tyrannies of Field Marshal Ayub Khan, General Zia-ul-Haq and General Pervez Musharf, women leaders like Mohtarma Fatima Jinnah, Begum Nusrat Bhutto and Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto have symbolised the people's resistance, speaks for itself.

On the social front, women community leaders have also remained instrumental in promoting education, health and economic freedom among their less fortunate sisters. In this regard, the services of Begum Rana Liaquat Ali Khan, wife of Pakistan's first Prime Minister, and the first woman Governor of any province in the country, surpass any other contemporary of her times.

It is thus that upon its formation, the Caucus attributed its creation to the legacy of Mohtarma Fatima Jinnah, Begum Rana Liaquat Ali Khan and Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto. In addition, the Caucus also dedicates itself to all women rights activists, who have remained in the fore-front of women's movement in Pakistan.

Global Perspectives:

The dawn of a new millennium has witnessed a major shift in the international trends, concerning women's representation at the key decision-making bodies. The changing patterns have particularly been encouraging in the developing countries of Africa and South Asia where the ratio of women representation was at all-time low at the close of the last century. Table I shows how percentages have shown a marked improvement in these regions.

Table –I: Comparative Analysis of Women's Representation in Select Parliaments of Developing Countries

Country	2008	1999
Rwanda	56.3% (1 st in ranking)	17.1% (31 st in ranking)
South Africa	44.5% (3 rd in ranking)	30% (8 th in ranking)
Angola	37.3% (10 th in ranking)	15.5% (34 th in ranking)
Nepal	33.2% (17 th in ranking)	5.9% (84 th in ranking)
Afghanistan	27.7% (30 th in ranking)	NIL
Pakistan	22.5% (46 th in ranking)	2.3% (105 th in ranking)
Bangladesh	18.6% (62 nd in ranking)	9.1% (64 th in ranking)
India	10.7 % (100 th in ranking)	8.4% (65 th in ranking)
Bhutan	8.5% (110 th in ranking)	2% (107 th in ranking)
The Maldives	6.5% (118 th in ranking)	3% (82 nd in ranking)
Sri Lanka	5.8% (122 nd in ranking)	4.9% (92 nd in ranking)

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union website information

The increase in numbers has certainly enabled women legislators to push for a gender-based national agenda at their respective levels and make their presence felt by forming pressure groups, alliances and caucuses.

The idea of working through Caucuses in parliaments, though new and relatively unknown in Pakistan, is nevertheless quite in vogue around the world. With more than 150 caucuses in the US legislatures, the two Houses of Congress have nurtured the "caucus tradition" for more than 300 years. Nestled deep to the political parties' level, the Caucuses have a strong voice in decision-making in the American political system, where the "Iowa Caucus" or the "Taxes Caucus" plays a crucial role in selecting the presidential candidates. Inside the Congress, the "Black Caucus", "Hispanic Caucus" or the "Women Caucus" have also greatly influenced in reshaping US policies by introducing "en-block" amendments to the existing laws or jointly introducing new laws.

In recent times, Women MPs have been quite pro-active in most of the Latin American and African countries in forming broad-based groups and Caucuses to help address vital gender-related issues in their respective countries. Thanks to the active lobbying through these Caucuses, the widening and addressing the challenge of women's political participation and representation is today being seen as a priority in countries like Angola, Botswana, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland,

Beyond the Numbers.... How Can Caucus be Effective?

“...In addition to the number and type of women who are in parliament, the extent to which women parliamentarians work together through a caucus may affect the impact of women politicians on public policy. Existing research tends to suggest that the presence or absence of an organized women’s caucus can influence the extent to which women legislators actively discuss and work on legislation that affects women and have a positive influence on the passage of such bills. Where women legislators constitute a critical mass and are organized into a caucus, women may be more likely to make a difference. In their study of state legislatures in the United States, Thomas and Welch found that legislatures where women are present in great numbers, and especially where they work together collectively through a caucus, are more likely to focus legislative attention on, and pass legislation benefiting, women, children, and families. However, a study conducted in a non-western county revealed reservations about the argument that the presence of a formal women’s caucus has a gendered impact on policies. In Thailand, a study of female impact on public policy concluded that efforts had been made to provide a focal point for legislators of all parties — the Women’s Parliamentarian Club — consisting of women members of the lower house and senators. It was established in 1992, and was intended as a forum for women legislators in both houses of the national legislature to sit together and provide encouragement and support for efforts that they make on behalf of women. Although it is the only formal space for women legislators, the Club has not been very successful in forging unity as a majority of women legislators are infrequently involved in its activities. It seems that women legislators in the parliament do not have a strong collective sense of group membership since women are not a homogenous group. Its core membership consists of only about twenty members and, in the absence of a feminist identity or orientation among Thai parliamentarians, it meets quite infrequently.

Women groups—in any shape and form—presuppose the ability for women to unite around an issue. It is, however, important to note that women as group are not monolithic. They differ not only from men but also among themselves in their backgrounds, their party affiliations, their political ideologies, and their perceptions of their roles as public officeholders and members of society in large.”

*Extract from “Women Legislators and their Impact on Public policy: A Comparative Perspective” by Kazuki Iwanaga and Patricia Loreskar, **The Gender Face of Asian Politics**, pp 9*

Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe, where the women MPs of respective parliaments have also formed “broad-based” Regional Caucus. On the other hand, in countries like Brazil, it has now become customary that all women legislators, regardless of their political affiliations, vote en-block on issues affecting women.

In the South Asian region, Afghanistan and Pakistan have been in the forefront in forming Women’s Caucuses in the National Parliaments.

History of Women’s Parliamentary Participation in Pakistan:

Women remained among the heralds of the Pakistan Movement. The Founder of the Nation, Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah gave great importance to women’s active role in the political arena and encouraged their participation in the freedom struggle. As a result, many women came to the political limelight, such as his sister Mohtarma Fatima Jinnah, Begum Ranna Liaqat Ali Khan, Begum Maulana Mohammad Ali Johar (who was appointed to the Central Working Committee of the All India Muslim League), Begum Jahanara Shahnawaz (who represented the Indian women at the 2nd Roundtable Conference in London in 1932), her sister Gaitiara, Anwari Begum, Fatima Begum, Lady Hidayatullah and many others.

In fact, the Quaid’s sister Mohtarma Fatima Jinnah became a leading icon of the Pakistan Movement. Dr. Dushka Syed, a noted academic writes:

“The constant presence of Fatima Jinnah, the Quaid’s sister, was not accidental, but a message by this visionary leader that women should be equal partners in politics and that they should not be confined to the traditional home-bound role of a wife and a mother. It is not surprising then that he was constantly under attack of the orthodox religious parties. Once, so the story goes, he was about to address a mammoth public meeting, and was requested not to have Fatima Jinnah sitting on the dais by his side. He refused.”

*Women in Politics – Problems of Participation: A Case Study of Pakistan,
by Prof. Dr. Dushka Syed*

However, this forceful political participation in the freedom struggle could not be translated in effective parliamentary presence even after achieving a free Pakistan. The culture of keeping women in seclusion regardless of class, colour, creed or religion was deep-rooted in the Indo-Pak subcontinent and needed some kind of an “affirmative action” on part of the Government, ensuring women’s presence at the key decision-making levels. The idea of reserving special seats for women was thus introduced in the political fabric of the Sub-Continent when in the “Government of India Act 1935”, a quota of 3% seats were reserved for women against the popular demand of 10%. The interesting aspect however was that under this Act, only women could vote for women’s seats. The Principle of women’s representation in the Parliament was finally introduced in this part of the world.

The Initial Phase — 1947 – 1958:

Consequently, the first Constituent Assembly of the Dominion of Pakistan had only two Women Members, namely:

**Table I — Women Members of the First Constituent Assembly of Pakistan
1947 - 1954**

Sr. No.	Name	Constituency
1.	Begum Jahan Ara Shahnawaz	West Pakistan

2.	Begum Shaista Ikramullah	East Pakistan
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*Source: Father & Daughter; A Political Autobiography, pp 185,
by Jahan Ara Shahnawaz*

This Assembly was replaced by a nominated Chamber in 1955 after the then Governor General Ghulam Mohammad dismissed this Assembly on October 24, 1954. The new House did not have a single woman Member.

The first Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, passed in 1956, provided 10 reserved seats for women in the single-chamber Parliament (05 from West Pakistan and 05 from East Pakistan).

The significant feature in this regard was the “Principle of Female suffrage and Women’s Reserved Seats” — A dual voting right, under which the women were not only eligible to vote for a general seat but also for the women seats’ candidates

No elections were, however, held under this Constitution as the same was abrogated with the proclamation of first Marshal Law on October 8, 1958.

The Second Phase — 1962 Constitution:

The second Constitution, proclaimed in 1962 provided for a National Assembly, consisting of 156 indirectly elected Members, including 6 seats for women — 3 each for both wings of the State. These were:

Table II — Women Members on Reserved Seats in the National Assembly of Pakistan 1962- 1965

Sr. No.	Name	Constituency
1.	Begum Roquyya Anwar	East Pakistan
2.	Begum Serajunnessa Choudhury	East Pakistan
3.	Begum Shamsun Nahar Mahmood,	East Pakistan
4.	Begum Mujjebun Nisa Muhammad Akram	West Pakistan
5.	Begum Khadeja G. A. Khan	West Pakistan
6.	Begum Zari Sarfaraz	West Pakistan

Source: Library of National Assembly of Pakistan Records

In addition to the above six, one woman each managed from the both wings to get herself elected from the general seats through the electoral college of its respective province. These were:

Table III — Women Members Elected from General Constituencies in the National Assembly of Pakistan 1962- 1965

Sr. No.	Name	Constituency
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1.	Begum Zohra Aziz	Layalpur, West Pakistan
2.	Begum Hamida Mohammad Ali	Bogra, East Pakistan

Source: Library of National Assembly of Pakistan Records

However, none of them was ever given any ministerial position or appointed as Parliamentary Secretaries.

The trend of restricting women to mere reserved seats and to no other parliamentary or governmental position was continued in the next Assembly in 1965, created under this Constitution. The six women in the new Assembly were:

Table IV — Women Members on Reserved Seats in the National Assembly of Pakistan 1965- 1969

Sr. No.	Name	Constituency
1.	Mrs. Mariam Hashimuddin Ahmad	East Pakistan
2.	Begum Dolly Azad	East Pakistan
3.	Begum Razia Faiz	East Pakistan
4.	Begum Mujjebun Nisa Muhammad Akram	West Pakistan
5.	Begum Khadeja G. A. Khan	West Pakistan
6.	Begum Zari Sarfaraz	West Pakistan

Source: Library of National Assembly of Pakistan Records

The Third Phase — the Legal Framework Order:

The popular uprising against the first military dictator Ayub Khan led to another Marshal Law in 1969 by General Yahya Khan. He abrogated the 1962 Constitution and announced the first general elections in Pakistan's history on the basis of "One Man One Vote" under his "Legal Framework Order". The LFO provided for 13 reserved seats for women (6 from West Pakistan and 7 from East Pakistan) in the single chamber Assembly of 313. The elections were held on December 7, 1970 but the Assembly could not convene its session in wake of the secessionist movement in the country's eastern wing, leading to Pakistan's dismemberment and creation of Bangladesh. Mr. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the popular leader of the western wing formed the Government in the remaining country. The 144 members elected from the Western wing formed the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan, which was convened for the first time on 14th April 1972. It included six women Members, namely:

Table V — Women Members on Reserved Seats in the National Assembly of Pakistan 1972- 1977

Sr. No.	Name	Constituency
1.	Shireen Wahab	NWFP
2.	Mrs. Nargis Naeem	Punjab
3.	Nasim Jahan Begum	Punjab
4.	Zahida Sultana	Punjab

5.	Dr. Mrs. Ashraf Khatoon Abbassi	Sindh
6.	Mrs. Jehanzeba alis Jeneffer Mosa Qazi	Baluchistan

Source: Library of National Assembly of Pakistan Records

In addition to the above, Mrs. Najma Andrews also became the Member of the House on a minorities' seat for a short-while in 1976 after the death of a sitting MNA and her husband Mr. R. M. Andrews.

The Fourth Phase — 1973 Constitution and the Subsequent Steps:

The Assembly of 1970 will always be remembered for electing a woman, Begum Dr. Ashraf Abbassi as its Deputy Speaker for the first time in Pakistan's parliamentary history.

When the Constitution Committee was formed in 1972, three ladies, Nasim Jahan, Mrs Jennifer Qazi and Begum Ashraf Abassi were made its members.

It was also during this time when another Woman Member, Mrs. Nargis Naeem was appointed as the first woman Parliamentary Secretary in the House.

The revival of parliamentary democracy and the subsequent passage of the first consensus Constitution of Pakistan in 1973 enabled a sea-change in women's parliamentary participation when women were not only provided with 10 reserved berths in the Lower House but the then Government of the country's first elected Prime Minister, Mr. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto also supported women to the Upper House, the Senate. As a result, Samia Usman was elected as the first woman Senator. Besides, it was also in 1974 when Begum Rana Liaqat Ali Khan was appointed as the Governor of the province of Sindh — the first and only woman to take oath of such an exalted position so far in Pakistan's 62 years of history.

This trend was vigorously followed when women's parliamentary strength rose to 10 after the general elections in 1977. The new Assembly elected the following women on reserved seats:

Table VI — Women Members on Reserved Seats in the National Assembly of Pakistan March 1977- July 1977

Sr. No.	Name	Constituency
1.	Begum Kulsoom Saifullah	NWFP
2.	Mrs. Nargis Naeem	Punjab
3.	Mrs. Dilshad Begum	Punjab
4.	Begum Nafisa Khalid	Punjab
5.	Begum Bilqis Habibullah	Punjab
6.	Mrs. Samia Usman	Punjab
7.	Miss Mubarak Begum	Punjab
8.	Begum Nusrat Bhutto	Sindh

9.	Mrs. Nasima Sultana Akmut	Sindh
10.	Mrs. Bilqis Begum	Baluchistan

Source: Library of National Assembly of Pakistan Records

In addition to the above, one more woman, Mrs. Shavak Rustum, was also elected against one of the seats reserved for the minorities.

The elections of 1977 are also historic for the fact that in these elections, a woman, Begum Naseem Wali Khan, was directly elected for the first time from any general seat. She returned successful from two constituencies of the North West Frontier Province. Though Begum Naseem never took oath as a Member because of the Opposition's boycott, nevertheless it remains an unbroken record in its own right since no other woman has since then been able to get elected from this province on a general seat.

The Fifth Phase —Third Marshal Law and the Non-Party Assembly of 1985:

This Assembly proved short-lived and was dismissed just after three months with the imposition of Martial Law on July 5, 1977 and the subsequent suspension of the Constitution. The political activities were resumed in 1985 when elections were held on non-party basis in 1985 to elect an Assembly, comprising of a total of 237 Members. In these elections, two women were elected on the General Seats, namely:

Table VII — Women Members on General Seats in the National Assembly of Pakistan 1985- 1988

Sr. No.	Name	Constituency
1.	Begum Abida Hussain	NA-76 Jhang – IV
2.	Begum Nasim Majid Akhtar	NA-146 Bahawalnagar - V (Elected in by-election)

Source: Library of National Assembly of Pakistan Records

Begum Nasim Majid was also later appointed as the Parliamentary Secretary for Housing & Works.

It was also at that time that the select portions of the 1973 Constitution were revived under the Revival of Constitution Order (P.O.14 of 1985), which also increased the reserved seats for women from 10 to 20. Consequently, women entered in the central legislature in a considerable number.

Table VIII — Women Members on Reserved Seats in the National Assembly of Pakistan 1985- 1988

Sr. No.	Name	Constituency
1.	Begum Afsar Raza Qazalbash	Punjab
2.	Begum Sarwari Sadiq	Punjab

3.	Begum Silvat Sher Ali Khan	Punjab
4.	Mrs. Khurshid Begum	Punjab
5.	Mrs. Dureshahwar Mazari	Punjab
6.	Mrs. Rafia Tariq	Punjab
7.	Begum Rehana Aleem Mashahdi	Punjab
8.	Shahzadi Mehmooda Begum	Punjab
9.	Begum Ishrat Ashraf	Punjab
10.	Dr. Attiya Inayatullah	Punjab
11.	Mrs. Farrukh Mukhtar	Punjab
12.	Mrs. Nisar Fatima Zahra	Punjab
13.	Mrs. Afroze Nazir Ahmad	Sindh
14.	Begum Salma Ahmad	Sindh
15.	Mrs. Rashida Pasha Khoro	Sindh
16.	Mrs. Qamar-un-Nisa Qamar	Sindh
17.	Mrs. Bilquis Nasar-um-Minallah	N.W.F.P.
18.	Begum Kalsoom Saifullah	N.W.F.P.
19.	Dr. Miss. Noor Jahan Panazai	Baluchistan
20.	Bilgees Begum	Baluchistan

Source: Library of National Assembly of Pakistan Records

In addition to the above, Mrs. Leela Wanti managed to enter the Chamber on a reserved seat for the Minorities. All these women remained Members of the Assembly from 1985 till May 28, 1988, when the Assembly was dismissed by the then President.

This Assembly has the main distinction of having Women Members as Ministers in the Federal Cabinet for the first time when Begum Afsar Raza Qazalbash and Begum Kulsum Saifullah were appointed as Ministers of State in Prime Minister Mohammad Khan Jonejo's cabinet. Besides, Begum Rehana Aleem Mashahdi and Dr. Noor Jahan Panezai also served as Parliamentary Secretaries.

The Senate, which was also revived with the National Assembly, had no woman as Member.

The Sixth Phase — Return of Democracy and Party Politics:

The year 1988 saw historic changes on the political landscape of the country. Military Dictator General Zia died in a plane crash. In its aftermath, party-based elections were held in the country after 11 years on November 16, 1988. As a result, Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto became the first woman Prime Minister of not only Pakistan but in the entire Muslim World. This election also witnessed the election of at least four women from general seats, three of them getting elected from more than one constituency.

Table IX — Women Members Elected on General Seats in the National Assembly of Pakistan 1988- 1990

Sr. No.	Name	Constituency
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1.	Begum Nusrat Bhutto (PPP)	NA-24 Chitral & NA-164 Larkana I
2.	Begum Abida Hussain (IND)	NA-67 Jhang II & NA-68 Jhang III
3.	Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto (PPP)	NA-94 Lahore, NA-166 Larkana III & NA-189 Karachi (S)-I
4.	Dr. Ashraf Khatoon Abbassi (PPP)	NA-165 Larkana II

Source: Library of National Assembly of Pakistan Records

Besides, this 8th National Assembly also had other 20 women members on reserved seats.

Table X — Women Members Elected on Reserved Seats in the National Assembly of Pakistan 1988- 1990

Sr. No.	Name	Constituency
1.	Begum Rehana Sarwar (PPP)	Punjab
2.	Begum Sarwari Sadiq (IJI)	Punjab
3.	Begum Ndira Khan Khakwani (PPP)	Punjab
4.	Mrs. Amina Paracha (PPP)	Punjab
5.	Mrs. Razia Sultana (IND)	Punjab
6.	Mrs. Shahnaz Begum (PPP)	Punjab
7.	Begum Rehana Aleem Mashahdi (IJI)	Punjab
8.	Ms. Shahnaz Wazir Ali (PPP)	Punjab
9.	Mrs. Abida Malik (PPP)	Punjab
10.	Dr. Attiya Inayatullah (IJI)	Punjab
11.	Mrs. Aamira Ehsan (IJI)	Punjab
12.	Mrs. Nasreen Begum (PPP)	Punjab
13.	Mrs. Shamim N.D. Khan (PPP)	Sindh
14.	Dr. Mrs. Mehmooda Shah (PPP)	Sindh
15.	Mrs. Ruqia Khanum Soomro (PPP)	Sindh
16.	Mrs. Zareen Majeed (Haq Parast)	Sindh
17.	Malik Mehr-un-Nisa Afridi (PPP)	N.W.F.P.
18.	Begum Kalsoom Saifullah (IJI)	N.W.F.P.
19.	Mrs. Samina Razak (PPP)	Baluchistan
20.	Bibi Amina JUL(F)	Baluchistan

Source: Library of National Assembly of Pakistan Records

Mohtarma's election as Prime Minister brought about a revolution in women's political and parliamentary role. The Assembly elected Dr. Ashraf Abbassi once again as its Deputy Speaker while the Federal Cabinet had some 5 women as Ministers, which included Begum Nusrat Bhutto as Senior Minister, Begum Rehana Sarwar as Federal Minister for Women Development, Begum Shahnaz Wazir Ali as Minister of State for Education, Begum Mehmooda Shah as Minister of State for Social Welfare and Begum Nadir Khakwani as Minister of State for Population Welfare.

It was also in 1988 when one woman Dr. Noor Jahan Panazai was elected as Senator from Baluchistan. She also served as the first woman Deputy Chairperson of the Upper

House from 1991 to 1993. She however remained the lone woman legislator in the Chamber for the whole period of six years.

The Seventh Phase — End of the Reserved Seats; 1990 onwards:

The dismissal of the 8th National Assembly on August 6, 1990 also marked the end of an era of women’s rise into the corridors of power for a long time to come. With the exit of this Assembly also culminated the Constitutional leave of reserving Women Seats till two general elections.

The new House of 217 members, thus emerging after the elections of October 24, 1990 had only two women Members, Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto and Begum Nusrat Bhutto, both elected from their home constituencies.

Table XI — Women Members Elected on General Seats in the National Assembly of Pakistan 1990-1993

Sr. No.	Name	Constituency
1.	Begum Nusrat Bhutto (PPP)	NA-164 Larkana I
2.	Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto (PPP)	NA-166 Larkana III

Source: Library of National Assembly of Pakistan Records

The rather disappointing scenario, nevertheless, came with a pinch of salt as Mohtarma was not only the first-ever woman to become a Leader of the Opposition in the National Parliament but also for her so-far unbroken record of getting elected with the highest percentage of votes, ever secured by any successful candidate in a party-based election — 98.48%.

The 10th National Assembly came into being after general elections were held on October 6, 1993. With no reserved seats for women, four women managed to get through the House from General Seats.

Table XII — Women Members Elected on General Seats in the National Assembly of Pakistan 1993-1996

Sr. No.	Name	Constituency
1.	Begum Shahnaz Javed (PPP)	NA-126 Sahiwal III
2.	Begum Tehmina Daultana (PML-N)	NA-130 Vehari II
3.	Begum Nusrat Bhutto (PPP)	NA-164 Larkana I
4.	Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto (PPP)	NA-166 Larkana III

Source: Library of National Assembly of Pakistan Records

Consequently, Mohtarma took oath as Prime Minister for the second time while Ms. Shahnaz Wazir Ali, a Non-Member, was appointed as the Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Social Sector.

It was also during this term of her office when Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto presented the idea of an organisation of women parliamentarians. In her leadership, Pakistan hosted the first ever Conference of Muslim Women Parliamentarians in Islamabad in 1995. The momentum, unfortunately, could not be kept after Mohtarma's ouster in 1996.

In the Upper House, the dismal situation registered some improvements in 1994 when Ms. Fiza Junejo from Punjab and Ms. Nasreen Jaleel from Sindh were elected as Senators.

The musical chair of power politics entered yet another round when this Assembly was also shown the door by the President under the infamous Article 58 (2)B of the Constitution, paving way for the next general elections which were held on February 3, 1997. The tally of women MPs further improved and this time 6 women in general elections and 01 woman in by-elections managed to enter the Lower Chamber.

Table XIII — Women Members Elected on General Seats in the National Assembly of Pakistan 1997-1999

Sr. No.	Name	Constituency
1.	Begum Abida Hussain (PML-N)	NA-69 Jhang-IV
2.	Begum Majeeda Wyne (PML-N)	NA-123 Khanewal-III
3.	Begum Tehmina Daultana (PML-N)	NA-130 Vehari-II
4.	Begum Nusrat Bhutto (PPP)	NA-164 Larkana-I
5.	Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto (PPP)	NA-166 Larkana-III & NA-171 Hyderanad-V
6.	Dr. Fehmida Mirza (PPP)	NA-173 Badin-II
7.		

Source: Library of National Assembly of Pakistan Records

During this tenure, Begum Abida Hussain MNA and Begum Tehmina Daultana MNA were inducted in the Federal Cabinet as Ministers while Begum Ishrat Ashraf, a non-member was also made an Advisor to the Prime Minister.

The Seventh Phase — The Post-2000 Democracy:

Eventually, curtains were called on the democratic set-up when the government of Mian Nawaz Sharif was dismissed through the fourth military coup on October 12, 1999. Parliament was only restored in 2002 with major amendments in the 1973 Constitution, brought in shape of a "Legal Framework Order 2002". Under this LFO, the long-standing popular demand of reserving seats for women was accepted in principle. It had been demanded that women should be given at least 33% representation. However, the LFO agreed to 17%, devoting 60 seats in a 342-Member National Assembly and 17 in a 100-Member Senate. Under this new arrangement, election procedure for these reserved seats was also changed and "List System" was introduced. The emerging parliamentary groups, thus, were to get these seats in proportion to their general representation in the House.

Elections were held on October 10, 2002 and this time, the tally of women returning from the General Seats, improved in a considerable number, crossing the double-digit figure for the first time. Initially, 13 women were elected. However, one of them, Ms. Eman Wasim vacated her seat, enabling Mr. Shaukat Aziz's eventual election as the country's Prime Minister.

Table XIV — Women Members Elected on General Seats in the National Assembly of Pakistan 2002-2007

Sr. No.	Name	Constituency
1.	Ms. Eman Wasim (PML-Q) (resigned in 2004)	NA-59 Attock-III
2.	Ms. Sumaira Malik (NA)	NA-69 Khushab-I
3.	Mst. Ghulam Bibi Bharwana (PML-Q)	NA-87 Jhang-II
4.	Ms. Saima Akhtar Bharwana (Ind)	NA-90 Jhang-V
5.	Ms. Riffat Javaid Kahlon (PML-Q)	NA-117 Narowal-III
6.	Ms. Samina Khalid Ghurki (PPP-P)	NA-130 Lahore-XIII
7.	Ms. Rubina Shaheen Wattoo (Ind)	NA-147 Okara-V
8.	Mrs. Khalida Mohsin Ali (PPP-P)	NA-176 Muzafargarh-I
9.	Ms. Hina Rabbani Khar (PML-Q)	NA-177 Muzafargarh-II
10.	Dr. Azra Fazal Pechuho (PPP-P)	NA-213 Nawabshah-I
11.	Mrs. Shamshad Sattar Bachani (PPP-P)	NA-223 Hyderabad-VI
12.	Dr. Fehmida Mirza (PPP-P)	NA-225 Badin-II
13.	Ms. Zubaida Jalal (PML-Q)	Na-272 Kech-cum-Gawadar

Source: Library of National Assembly of Pakistan Records

Besides, another 60 women were also elected as Members of the National Assembly on Reserved Seats.

Table XV — Women Members Elected on Reserved Seats in the National Assembly of Pakistan 2002-2007

Sr. No.	Name	Constituency
1.	Ms. Mehnaz Rafi (PML-Q)	Punjab
2.	Dr. Hajira Tariq Aziz (PML-Q)	Punjab
3.	Ms. Tanzeela Aamir Cheema (PML-Q)	Punjab
4.	Dr. Donya Aziz (PML-Q)	Punjab
5.	Ms. Kashmala Tariq (PML-Q)	Punjab
6.	Dr. Saira Tariq (PML-Q)	Punjab
7.	Mrs. Riffat Amjad (PML-Q)	Punjab
8.	Dr. Attiya Inayatullah (PML-Q)	Punjab
9.	Ms. Bushra Rehaman (PML-Q)	Punjab
10.	Ms. Farzeen Ahmed Sarfaraz (PML-Q)	Punjab

11.	Shahzadi Umer Zadi Tiwana (PML-Q)	Punjab
12.	Ms. Raheela Munawar (PML-Q)	Punjab
13.	Prof. Aasiya Azeem (PML-Q)	Punjab
14.	Dr. Firdaus Ashiq Awan (PML-Q)	Punjab
15.	Begum Tehmina Dasti (PML-Q)	Punjab
16.	Ms. Onaza Ehsan (PML-Q)	Punjab
17.	Ms. Bushra Anwar Sipra (PML-Q)	Punjab
18.	Dr. Rozina Tufail (PML-Q)	Punjab
19.	Ms. Tahira Asif (PML-Q)	Punjab
20.	Ms. Naheed Khan (PPP-P)	Punjab
21.	Ms. Beelum Hasnain (PPP-P)	Punjab
22.	Ms. Shakeela Khanum Rashid (PPP-P)	Punjab
23.	Ms. Fauzia Habib (PPP-P)	Punjab
24.	Ms. Mehreen Anwar Raja (PPP-P)	Punjab
25.	Ms. Yasmeen Rehman (PPP-P)	Punjab
26.	Begum Shahnaz Shaikh (PPP-P-P)	Punjab
27.	Ms. Rukhsana Bangash (PPP-P)	Punjab
28.	Ms. Naseem Chaudhary (PPP-P)	Punjab
29.	Ms. Samia Raheel Qazi (MMA)	Punjab
30.	Ms. Maimoona Hashmi (PML-N)	Punjab
31.	Begum Ishrat Ashraf (PML-N)	Punjab
32.	Begum Tehmina Daultana (PML-N)	Punjab
33.	Begum Rehana Aleem Mashhadi (PML-J)	Punjab
34.	Ms. Meena Laghari (NA)	Punjab
35.	Ms. Ayla Malik (NA)	Punjab
36.	Ms. Fiza Junejo (PML-Q)	Sindh
37.	Ms. Shery Rehman (PPP-P)	Sindh
38.	Ms. Ruqaiya Khanum Soomro (PPP-P)	Sindh
39.	Ms. Fauzia Wahab (PPP-P)	Sindh
40.	Ms. Rubina Saddat Qaimkhani (PPP-P)	Sindh
41.	Ms. Nafisa Munawar Raja (PPP-P)	Sindh
42.	Ms. Shagufta Jumani (PPP-P)	Sindh
43.	Dr. Farida Ahmed (MMA)	Sindh
44.	Ms. Aisha Munawar (MMA)	Sindh
45.	Ms. Shamim Akhtar (MQM)	Sindh
46.	Ms. Afsar Begum (MQM)	Sindh
47.	Ms. Shabina Talat (MQM)	Sindh
48.	Ms. Gul-e-Farkhanda (NA)	Sindh
49.	Ms. Khurshid Afghan (PML-F)	Sindh
50.	Ms. Zaib Gohar Ayub (PML-Q)	N.W.F.P.
51.	Sayyada Farhana Khalid Banoori (MMA)	N.W.F.P.
52.	Ms. Razia Aziz (MMA)	N.W.F.P.
53.	Nayyar Sultan (MMA)	N.W.F.P.
54.	Ms. Jamila Ahmed (MMA)	N.W.F.P.
55.	Ms. Ambareen Naseem (MMA)	N.W.F.P.

56.	Ms. Inayat Begum (MMA)	N.W.F.P.
57.	Ms. Shahida Akhtar Ali (MMA)	N.W.F.P.
58.	Dr. Noor Jahan Panezai (PML-Q)	Baluchistan
59.	Ms. Imrana Khawar (MMA)	Baluchistan
60.	Ms. Bilqees Saif (MMA)	Baluchistan

Source: Library of National Assembly of Pakistan Records

In addition to the above, Ms. Asiya Nasir was also elected on one of the seats reserved for the Minorities.

In the re-constituted Senate as well, 17 women (04 from each province and 01 from the Federal Capital) were elected. Table XVI reflects all the names of women Senators, who served during the six years for their respective terms.

Table XVI — Women Senators Elected on Reserved Seats in the Senate of Pakistan 2003-2009

Sr. No.	Name	Constituency
1.	Dr. Nighat Agha (retired in 2006)	Punjab
2.	Ms. Gulshan Saeed	Punjab
3.	Ms. Rozina Alam Khan	Punjab
4.	Ms. Saadia Abbasi	Punjab
5.	Ms. Nilofar Bakhtiar (elected in 2006)	Punjab
6.	Ms. Abida Saif (retired in 2006)	Sindh
7.	Bibi Yasmeen Shah	Sindh
8.	Engr. Rukhsana Zubairi	Sindh
9.	Ms. Nighat Mirza (retired in 2006)	Sindh
10.	Ms. Tanveer Khalid (elected in 2006)	Sindh
11.	Ratna Bhagwandas (elected in 2006)	Sindh
12.	Ms. Sameen Yousuf Siddiqui (elected in 2006)	Sindh
13.	Ms. Anisa Zaib Tahirkheli	N.W.F.P.
14.	Dr. Kausar Firdaus	N.W.F.P.
15.	Ms. Fauzia Fakhar-uz-Zaman	N.W.F.P.
16.	Ms. Mumtaz Bibi (retired in 2006)	N.W.F.P.
17.	Ms. Afia Zia (elected in 2006)	N.W.F.P.
18.	Ms. Pari Gul Agha	Baluchistan
19.	Ms. Kalsoom Parveen	Baluchistan
20.	Ms. Roshan Khursheed Barocha (retired in 2006)	Baluchistan
21.	Ms. Shereen Noor (retired in 2006)	Baluchistan
22.	Ms. Raheela Yahya Baluch (elected in 2006)	Baluchistan
23.	Ms. Sabina Rauf (elected in 2006)	Baluchistan
24.	Ms. Tahira Latif	Federal Capital

Source: Library of Senate of Pakistan Records

Hence, with a total of 74 women Members and some 17 Senators at one given time, this was the highest number of female representation, ever achieved in the corridors of power. Consequently, many women were included in the Federal Cabinet, appointed as Parliamentary Secretaries and also elected as Chairpersons of various Standing Committees. Ms. Zubaida Jalal remained a Federal Minister in the cabinet of Prime Minister Zafarullah Jamali while Ms. Nilofar Bakhtiar was appointed as Advisor. She was later inducted as full Minister in the cabinet of Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz, which also had Ms. Sumaira Malik and Ms. Zubaida Jalal as Federal Ministers and Ms. Hina Rabani Khar, Ms. Ghulam Bibi Bharwana, Ms. Anisa Zaib Tahirkheli and Ms. Shahnaz Sheikh as Ministers of State. Besides, 6 other women Members were made Parliamentary Secretaries while 9 were elected as Chairpersons of the National Assembly's Standing Committees.

A move to establish a Women's Parliamentary Caucus was also made during this time period but remained unsuccessful in the deeply polarised political scenario.

The Eighth Phase — February 18, 2008 Elections & Onwards:

The elections held on February 18, 2008 will always be remembered in the history of Pakistan as a major turning point. Held in the shadows of Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto's martyrdom, the events which followed also proved historical. Dr. Fehmida Mirza, a third-time winner from a rural general constituency in Sindh's remote Badin district was elected with an overwhelming two-third majority as the first Woman Speaker of the House, not only in Pakistan but in the entire Muslim World. Along-with her, as many as 15 other women were also elected from the General seats.

Table XVII — Women Members Elected on General Seats in the National Assembly of Pakistan 2008-Till date

Sr. No.	Name	Constituency
1.	Ms. Sumaira Malik (PML)	NA-69 Khushab-I
2.	Ms. Raheela Baluch (PPP-P)	NA-78 Faisalabad-IV
3.	Mst. Ghulam Bibi Bharwana (PML)	NA-87 Jhang-II
4.	Ms. Saima Akhtar Bharwana (Ind)	NA-90 Jhang-V
5.	Ms. Farkhanda Amjad (PML)	NA-92 T.T.Singh-I
6.	Ms. Saira Afzal Tarar (PML-N)	NA-102 Hafizabad-I
7.	Dr. Firdous Ashiq Awan (PPP-P)	NA-113 Sialkot-II
8.	Ms. Sumaira Yasir Rasheed (PML-N)	NA-115 Narowal-I
9.	Ms. Samina Khalid Ghurki (PPP-P)	NA-130 Lahore-XIII
10.	Begum Tehmina Daultana (PML-N)	NA-169 Vehari-III
11.	Ms. Hina Rabbani Khar (PML-Q)	NA-177 Muzafargarh-II
12.	Ms. Faryal Talpur (PPP-P)	NA-207 Larkana-IV
13.	Dr. Azra Fazal Pechuho (PPP-P)	NA-213 Nawabshah-I
14.	Mrs. Shamshad Sattar Bachani (PPP-P)	NA-223 Hyderabad-VI
15.	Dr. Fehmida Mirza (PPP-P)	NA-225 Badin-II

16.	Ms. Khushbakht Shujaat (MQM)	Na-250 Karachi-XII
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Source: Library of National Assembly of Pakistan Records

The women returning on reserved seats were:

Table XVIII — Women Members Elected on Reserved Seats in the National Assembly of Pakistan 2002-2007

Sr. No.	Name	Constituency
1.	Begum Ishrat Ashraf (PML-N)	Punjab
2.	Ms. Maimoona Hashmi (PML-N)	Punjab
3.	Ms. Qudsia Arshad (PML-N)	Punjab
4.	Ms. Tahira Aurangzaib (PML-N)	Punjab
5.	Ms. Nuzhat Sadiq (PML-N)	Punjab
6.	Ms. Nighat Parveen Mir (PML-N)	Punjab
7.	Ms. Khalida Mansoor (PML-N)	Punjab
8.	Ms. Shahnaz Saleem (PML-N)	Punjab
9.	Ms. Parveen Masood Bhatti (PML-N)	Punjab
10.	Ms. Sabeen Rizvi (PML-N)	Punjab
11.	Ms. Shireen Arshad Khan (PML-N)	Punjab
12.	Ms. Surriya Asghar (PML-N)	Punjab
13.	Ms. Tasneem Siddiqui (PML-N)	Punjab
14.	Ms. Nisar Tanveer (PML-N)	Punjab
15.	Ms. Shaheen Ishfaq (PML-N)	Punjab
16.	Ms. Anusha Rahman Khan (PML-N)	Punjab
17.	Ms. Beelum Hasnain (PPP-P)	Punjab
18.	Ms. Shakeela Khanum Rashid (PPP-P)	Punjab
19.	Ms. Fauzia Habib (PPP-P)	Punjab
20.	Ms. Mehreen Anwar Raja (PPP-P)	Punjab
21.	Ms. Yasmeen Rehman (PPP-P)	Punjab
22.	Ms. Rukhsana Bangash (PPP-P)	Punjab
23.	Ms. Naseem Chaudhary (PPP-P)	Punjab
24.	Ms. Palwasha Khan (PPP-P)	Punjab
25.	Ms. Farzana Raja (PPP-P)	Punjab
26.	Justice (R) Fakharrunnisa Khokhar (PPP-P)	Punjab
27.	Ms. Samina Mushtaq Pagganwala (PPP-P)	Punjab
28.	Ms. Shahnaz Wazir Ali (PPP-P)	Punjab
29.	Ms. Kashmala Tariq (PML)	Punjab
30.	Dr. Attiya Inayatullah (PML)	Punjab
31.	Ms. Bushra Rehaman (PML)	Punjab
32.	Begum Shahnaz Shaikh (PML)	Punjab
33.	Ms. Nosheen Saeed (PML)	Punjab
34.	Ms. Marvi Memon (PML)	Punjab
35.	Dr. Donya Aziz (PML)	Punjab
36.	Ms. Fiza Junejo (PML)	Sindh

37.	Ms. Shery Rehman (PPP-P)	Sindh
38.	Ms. Nafisa Shah (PPP-P)	Sindh
39.	Ms. Fauzia Wahab (PPP-P)	Sindh
40.	Ms. Rubina Saddat Qaimkhani (PPP-P)	Sindh
41.	Ms. Farah Naz Ispahani (PPP-P)	Sindh
42.	Ms. Shagufta Jumani (PPP-P)	Sindh
43.	Dr. Mehreen Razaque Bhutto (PPP-P)	Sindh
44.	Dr. Nahid Shahid Ali (MQM)	Sindh
45.	Ms. Kishwar Zahra (MQM)	Sindh
46.	Ms. Fauzia Ejaz Khan (MQM)	Sindh
47.	Ms. Imrana Saeed Jamil (MQM)	Sindh
48.	Ms. Shagufta Sadiq (MQM)	Sindh
49.	Ms. Reena Kumari (PML-F)	Sindh
50.	Ms. Bushra Gohar (ANP)	N.W.F.P.
51.	Ms. Jamila Gilani (ANP)	N.W.F.P.
52.	Ms. Khurshid Begum (ANP)	N.W.F.P.
53.	Ms. Asma Arab Alamgir (PPP-P)	N.W.F.P.
54.	Malik Mehrunnisa Afridi (PPP-P)	N.W.F.P.
55.	Ms. Farhat Khan (PPP-P)	N.W.F.P.
56.	Dr. Imtiaz Sultan Bukhari (PML-N)	N.W.F.P.
57.	Ms. Farzana Mushtaq Ghani (PML)	N.W.F.P.
58.	Ms. Zubaida Jalal (PML)	Baluchistan
59.	Dr. Zil-e-Huma (PPP-P)	Baluchistan
60.	Ms. Aasiya Nasir (MMA)	Baluchistan

Source: Library of National Assembly of Pakistan Records

The Senate elections were held in March 2009. With its new composition, 17 women Senators were elected:

**Table XIX — Women Senators Elected on Reserved Seats in the Senate of Pakistan
2009-Till date**

Sr. No.	Name	Constituency
1.	Ms. Nilofar Bakhtiar	Punjab
2.	Ms. Gulshan Saeed	Punjab
3.	Begum Najma Hameed	Punjab
4.	Syeda Sughra Imam	Punjab
5.	Ms. Alman Parveen	Sindh
6.	Ms. Ratna Bhagwandas	Sindh
7.	Ms. Sameen Yousuf Siddiqui	Sindh
8.	Ms. Shirala Malik	Sindh
9.	Ms. Farah Aqil Shah	N.W.F.P.
10.	Ms. Farhat Abbas	N.W.F.P.
11.	Ms. Fauzia Fakhhar-uz-Zaman	N.W.F.P.
12.	Ms. Afia Zia	N.W.F.P.
13.	Ms. Suriya Amiruddin	Baluchistan
14.	Ms. Kalsoom Parveen	Baluchistan

15.	Ms. Raheela Yahya Baluch	Baluchistan
16.	Ms. Sabina Rauf	Baluchistan
17.	Dr. Saeeda Iqbal	Federal Capital

Source: Library of Senate of Pakistan Records

The presence of women in such historically high numbers enabled women to play a more dynamic role and seek offices beyond the traditional “welfare oriented” jobs. It was thus for the first time that Ms. Sherry Rehman served as Minister for Information from February 2008 to March 2009 and Begum Tehmina Daultana remained Federal Minister of Science & Technology from February 2008 to August 2008. Besides her, the cabinet of Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gillani has Dr. Firdaus Ashiq Awan and Ms. Samina Khalid Ghurki as Federal Ministers and Ms. Mehreen Anwar Raja, Ms. Hina Rabbani Khar and Ms. Shagufta Jumani are Ministers of State. Ms. Farzana Raja heads the biggest-ever welfare project in Pakistan’s history, Benazir Income Support Programme and is in the status of a Federal Minister while Ms. Shahnaz Wazir Ali serves as Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Social Sector. Another Member, Ms. Nafisa Shah is serving as Chairperson of the National Commission on Human Development.

There are 5 women Members serving as Parliamentary Secretaries and 6 have been elected as Chairpersons of the Standing Committees.

Formation of Women's Parliamentary Caucus – The Initial Efforts

The tragic assassination of Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto remains the most shocking incident of Pakistan's history. The heinous and deplorable act reinforced the need for across-the-board political reconciliation and national integration, a political philosophy that Ms. Bhutto vigorously advocated in her lifetime and which is largely accepted today as her last legacy.

An ardent advocate of women's rights as equal citizens of the country, Mohtarma also strived for creating effective forums for women empowerment and representation. The opening of First Women's Bank, creation of separate Women Police Stations, appointment of women judges in superior courts and establishment of a full-fledged Ministry of Women Development are some of the landmark achievements of her era. It was also during her tenure as Prime Minister when initial steps to organise women political leaders on a common platform were taken. Consequently, Islamabad hosted the first ever International Conference of Muslim Women Parliamentarians in August 1994. It was seen as an effort to bring women parliamentarians on a common agenda with a permanent forum.

While proposing the formation of such a Caucus for the first time, Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto, had articulated a multi-dimensional approach to enhancing women's role as Parliamentarians. She had highlighted the need:

- to take up gender concerns through the institutional structures of the parliament ensuring that norms promoting women's rights and empowerment were translated into national legislations;
- to coordinate and communicate with major women's organizations both in the public and private sectors outside the Parliament to oversee and extend support to implementation of gender sensitive policies and programmes and
- to connect with women parliamentarians across the globe by forming and strengthening alliances both with Muslim women parliamentarians and the non-Muslim world separately and collectively.

However, with her dismissal, the move could not hold grounds. Efforts for creating a Women's Caucus were also made after 2002 elections, when some 75 women were sitting as the Members of the 12th National Assembly but were met with little support, owing to the charged and deeply polarized political atmosphere, prevailing then in the country.

Women's Parliamentary Caucus – The Dream Comes True:

The election of over 22 percent women to the parliament on general and reserved seats in the February 18, 2008 elections and a woman elected as a Speaker of the National Assembly for the first time in Pakistan's democratic history, offered yet another bright opportunity for women parliamentarians to contribute towards making the parliament gender sensitive and increase its influence and interaction with outside organisations working on women's rights and empowerment both nationally and internationally.

Dr. Fehmida Mirza, the first Muslim woman Speaker in the entire Muslim World, rightly sensed its importance soon after her election to the coveted office and engaged women parliamentarians from all parliamentary parties in a series of dialogue on the issue. Her non-partisan conduct enabled her to win their confidence and so the first meeting of all women parliamentarians was called by the Speaker on October 20, 2008. The meeting, attended by 58 women MNAs, approved the Speaker's proposal for constituting a Women's Parliamentary Caucus and through a consensus vote, authorised her to take the necessary steps in this direction.

“RESOLUTION”

The sitting Women Parliamentarians, belonging to all Parliamentary Parties and Groups, represented in the 13th National Assembly do hereby resolve to constitute a “Women Parliamentary Caucus”.

PREAMBLE:

In recognition of the contributions to the cause of Pakistani women for political and social empowerment, the Women Parliamentary Caucus is to be established as a tribute to the pioneer women of Pakistan, namely Ms. Fatima Jinnah, Begum Rana Liaqat Ali Khan, Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto and all the women rights activists.

OBJECTIVES:

The Women Parliamentary Caucus will pursue the following objectives:

- 1. To attain a broad-based consensus among all women members of the Parliament on an agreed agenda for women development, empowerment and emancipation, enabling them to work beyond and above party lines for**

Consequently, a Steering Committee was constituted by the Speaker to draft the bylaws of the proposed Caucus. The Rules were thoroughly vetted by eminent legal minds and once the same were prepared, the Speaker called the formal meeting of Women Members of the National Assembly on November 21, 2008. It was in this meeting that through a Resolution, the “Women’s Parliamentary Caucus” was finally launched. The historic Resolution also clearly spells the main objectives of the WPC.

Thus established under the patronage of the Honourable Speaker, the Caucus was initially comprised of the women Members of the National Assembly. It was, nevertheless, extended to the 17 women Senators in March 2009, when elections of the Upper House were held, enabling the WPC to be truly representative of the whole of National Parliament.

The Caucus received a seal of approval from the National Assembly, which passed a unanimous Resolution on August 13, 2009, recognising its formation and congratulating the Speaker on its formation. The text of the Resolution of the National Assembly is placed as Annex-II.

the uplift of the women of Pakistan.

- 2. To enhance the role of women parliamentarians in proposing gender sensitive legislation, reviewing and amending discriminatory laws and policies;**
- 3. Ensure effective parliamentary oversight of implementation of international and regional commitments, national policies and programmes;**
- 4. Facilitate exchange of views and information sharing on critical areas of concern, particularly social discriminatory practices, both nationally and internationally;**
- 5. Liaise and build working relationship with key state and civil society institutions and organizations in order to contribute towards national and international efforts for promoting women’s rights, empowerment and gender equality;**
- 6. Review rules and procedures in order to ensure women’s continued access to, and participation in the National Assembly;**
- 7. To jointly work for the achievement of the social indicators so that the Millennium Development Goals are within reach.**

The House reposes its confidence in the leadership of the Speaker of the 13th National Assembly as a Patron and thanks her for the initiative taken by her for translating the idea of Caucus into reality.”

Unanimously Passed by the Women Members of the National Assembly on November 21, 2008

WPC Organisation:

The unanimously approved Bylaws of the WPC provide for a comprehensive mechanism for the smooth and broad-based participation of all members of the Caucus. According to the framed rules, the Caucus functions through three main decision-making bodies:

- i. **The Patron:** The woman legislator, serving the highest legislative office (either the Speaker, the Chairperson Senate, Deputy Speaker or the Deputy Chairperson) becomes the patron of the Caucus. She presides over the meetings of the General Assembly and Working Council and can convene their meetings as and when required. She's also authorised to take any decisions for the working of the Caucus, which are required to be ratified by the General Assembly. She's also authorised to appoint the Secretary and the Treasurer of the WPC from amongst the Members of the Caucus in consultation with the General Assembly.
- ii. **The General Assembly:** It comprises of all the Members of the Caucus. Only women legislators are eligible to become the Members of the Caucus. They are required to seek the membership by paying the membership fee, followed by monthly dues on quarterly basis. Any member failing to pay her dues for two consecutive quarters, gets her membership suspended. The membership can only be revived after seeking fresh membership. All decisions are taken by the General Assembly, which is bound to meet at least once in every session of the Parliament.
- iii. **The Working Council:** The Working Council comprises of representatives of all the parliamentary groups in the parliament, having women representation. Its members are chosen for a period of one year by the Patron in consultation with the General Assembly. It meets on frequent basis, as and when desired by the Patron and is authorised to take decisions and make plans for the effective functioning of the Caucus.

The Secretariat of WPC:

The above-mentioned offices and bodies work through a Secretariat of the Caucus, which is headed by the Secretary WPC. The Secretary is appointed by the Patron in consultation with the General Assembly for a period of one year from amongst the Members of the Caucus and is responsible for running the day-to-day business of the WPC. She's also responsible for keeping the records of the General Assembly and Working Council meetings, setting their respective agenda and getting their decisions implemented through the Secretariat.

In addition to the Secretary, the Secretariat also comprises of a Treasurer, who is also appointed by the Patron in consultation with the General Assembly from amongst the Members of the Caucus for a period of one year. All financial matters, including the accounts, are dealt by her in association with the Secretary.

The Office of the WPC Secretariat:

A fully functional office of the Women's Parliamentary Caucus has been established in the Parliament House, which was inaugurated by the Honourable Prime Minister of Pakistan Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani on July 6, 2009.

Sponsored by the "Strengthening Democracy through Parliamentary Development (SDPD)" Project of the United Nation's Development Programme, the artistically furnished office is planned effectively to cater to the needs of the Caucus and reflects the "touch of a woman", integrated with the "needs of a responsible parliamentarian". The whole compound has wireless internet facility, enabling the Members of the Caucus to use it for their personal benefit as well. Other state-of the art facilities include:

- i. **Conference Room:** It has a seating capacity of 20 with an additional space for 30 chairs. It is equipped with most modern video conferencing facility, audio system, wireless multi-media projectors, and a 40" plasma screen. All important meetings, including those of the General Assembly and the Working Council, are held here.
- ii. **The Secretary's Office:** This provides for the private working space for the Caucus Secretary and the Treasurer. It has all the needed facilities, including a desktop computer, fax machine, coloured printer and a wireless internet facility.
- iii. **Executive Office:** The space is provided with filing cabinets, desktop and laptop computers, scanner machine, heavy-duty photo-copier, coloured and black & white laser printers and other related office equipment.

Besides the above, the office also contains a Reception and Waiting Area. It is provided with a small library, featuring literature, concerning women issues and related legislation. Besides, a small and compact kitchenette, equipped with a fridge, microwave oven and a water dispenser, also forms part of the Office.