EXPLORING THE ISSUES AND CHALLENGES TO FEMALE POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT IN PUNJAB ASSEMBLY, PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

This research article delves into the intricate and critical issues surrounding female empowerment in the political arena, using the Punjab Assembly as a case study. Through a comprehensive analysis, it explores the various issues and challenges that women parliamentarians encounter in their pursuit of active political participation. Exploratory research design was used and by drawing upon a rich tapestry of data, including in-depth interviews of 11 female parliamentarians, and an extensive review of the existing literature, this research offered a nuanced understanding of the political empowerment dynamics at play. The primary data was analyzed using thematic analysis technique. The findings underscore the significance of addressing gender-based disparities and fostering an environment conducive to women politicians.

Keywords: *political empowerment, Punjab Assembly, female politicians, challenges, Gender and Politics.*

INTRODUCTION

Since the advent of democracy in the 5th century BC, women have faced systemic exclusion from political participation and decision-making processes (Blackwell, 2003)[i]. The United Nations, established in 1946, marked a turning point, drawing international attention to women's historical disenfranchisement from positions of power. In Pakistan, a democratic nation committed to gender equality, the representation of women alongside men in the decision-making process is of paramount importance. It is vital for women to have a substantial voice to articulate their views and needs. Women's representation in legislative bodies and governmental institutions empowers them, as it influences the formulation of policies affecting their well-being.

(Duflo, 2012)[ii]. Therefore, the level of women's participation in government institutions is a critical area of inquiry. This study addresses this pressing need by delving into the challenges and issues faced by women parliamentarians and their impact on effective service delivery.

To distinguish between "issues" and "challenges" within the context of this study, let's clarify their operationalization. Challenges encompass external factors that impede service delivery, while issues refer to internal complexities (e.g., ideological or capacity-related) that affect elected women parliamentarians' ability to deliver services.

The study identifies two major independent variables: "Parliamentarian's context," which encompasses issues related to the

parliamentarian herself (e.g., education, political skills, and internalization of public-private roles), and "parliamentary culture," which includes the patriarchal nature of politics, societal perceptions, gender bias in political functions, party dynamics, and structural barriers. These variables serve as the study's primary independent variables, while effective parliamentary service delivery stands as the dependent variable.

The literature review underscores that various social, cultural, religious, educational, and institutional factors hinder women's political service delivery. The prevalence of a less democratic culture is a significant concern, particularly in relatively unstable democracies like Pakistan. In a political landscape where women are often perceived as incapable of public tasks, their potential contribution to the country's political profile is overlooked. Additionally, male-dominated political parties tend to neglect women and their interests. Thus, this study aims to shed light on this under-researched area, seeking to uncover the issues and challenges faced by women parliamentarians in effectively delivering parliamentary services within Pakistan's unique political context.

Research Objective
The objective of the study is to:
1. Explore and establish the localized issues and challenges faced by elected women parliamentarians to deliver effective parliamentary services

Research questions
1. What are the important issues the elected women parliamentarians face while delivering parliamentary services?
2. What are the important challenges the elected women parliamentarians face while delivering parliamentary services?
3. How do women parliamentarians overcome their issues and challenges?

Scope of the Study
The content scope of the study is limited to see the issues and challenges to elected women parliamentarians of Punjab Assembly to deliver effective parliamentary services. The geographic location of the study is Lahore where the Punjab Assembly exists. The rational of selecting Punjab Assembly is its characteristic of the biggest legislature of Pakistan in terms of numbers of parliamentarians overall, 371 in total and largest number of women are sitting in this assembly particularly, 74 in total including 66 on reserved seats, 7 on general seats and 1 parliamentarian on minority seat. The time scope of the study is cross-sectional.

Significance of the Study
Very few studies in Pakistan are yet published with the objective of analyzing the parliamentary performance of women parliamentarians against the roles designated to them as Parliamentarians. This study aims to create literature that will help in understanding the real factors that challenge the effective service delivery by elected women parliamentarian. The information learned from this study will expand the understanding as well as fix the deficit and create a counter narrative to the current discourse of accusing women parliamentarians about less effective parliamentary services and may help in creating desirable interventions for women political leaders to create the gender-neutral polity. This article not only contributes to the understanding of gender politics but also provides practical recommendations for policymakers and stakeholders seeking to promote more equitable and inclusive political systems.

Review of the Related Literature
Despite women comprising half of the world's population, they continue to be drastically underrepresented in political leadership positions around the world.[iii] In 1955, women made up just three percent of members of parliament worldwide; this number increased to 11.6 percent in 1995. The last twenty years have seen particular progress; with women's representation nearly doubling from that in 1995 to nearly 21.8 percent in 2016. The trajectory is similar for women ministers in the executive branch. In 1999, women occupied less than nine percent of all ministerial positions in the executive branch;

today, women represent 17.2 percent of worldwide ministerial positions.

As per Women Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index Report, (2021)[iv] the most significant gender gap persists in the realm of Political Empowerment, with a mere 22% of it closed at present. This gap has actually widened by 2.4 percentage points since the 2020 edition of the report. Across the 156 countries included in the index, women hold just 26.1% of approximately 35,500 parliamentary seats and a mere 22.6% of the 3,400+ ministerial positions worldwide. Furthermore, in 81 countries, there has never been a female head of state as of January 15, 2021. If the current rate of progress continues, the World Economic Forum predicts that it will take a staggering 145.5 years to achieve gender parity in the field of politics. Though progress is being achieved, the gains have been slow.

The U.N. observes that women constitute "world's largest excluded category". For the attainment of true democratic spirit shall be ensured better political participation. Naila Kabeer (2005)[v] along with Amartya Sen (1999)[vi] has long argued, is to increase women's voice and agency through their independence and their empowerment. If there is one common factor in the above reasons advanced for women's lack of presence in politics, and the strategies developed in response, it is that they all arise from the perspective that women themselves are lacking in some way. They are not educated enough! They are not confident enough! They are not experienced enough! This is blaming the victim. (Longwe, 2000)[vii]. The role of civil society in mobilizing and advocating for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) regarding Gender equality has been far greater than for the preceding Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). (Gita Sen, 2019)[viii].

Situation in South Asia

South Asia is a home of variety of cultures, languages and religions. Here we can find a number of variations in customs, value systems and ways of life. But one thing is common among all the cultures of South Asia that is gender discrimination. Women traditionally are considered subordinated to the male and this remained a prominent feature. As far as the legal position is concerned, the constitutions of almost all the South Asian countries accept equal rights for all citizens and reject any discrimination on the basis of gender alone. But still discrimination in law making and policy making is continued. It has been a complex debate in political science that no one represents the other except the interests. Different classes and the minorities should be represented through their own representatives. So it is truly believed that only women can represent their interests and their presence is inevitable in decision making bodies.

Eminent scholars of South Asia have long emphasized the significance of women's political empowerment in the region. Nobel laureate Amartya Sen[ix], for instance, has underscored that women's participation in political processes is a fundamental aspect of development and democracy. He contends that political empowerment is intrinsically tied to other dimensions of empowerment, such as social and economic well-being. Similarly, prominent activist and scholar, Kamla Bhasin, has championed the cause of gender equality in South Asia, stressing that the political inclusion of women is essential for dismantling patriarchal structures and achieving a more just society. Bhasin (2016)[x], like many others, advocates for not only increasing women's representation in politics but also ensuring their active participation and influence in decision-making. These viewpoints collectively highlight the vital role that women's political empowerment plays in shaping the future of South Asia, fostering more equitable societies, and promoting the overall development of the region.

Women Political Participation in Pakistan

Pakistani women are coming forward to take part in every field of life including politics. As Qadri and Umar (2015)[xi] stated that in 2000, the quota for women's political participation was raised to 33% at the local government level. This quota was effective at three levels of the local government, namely the union council, the tehsil, and the district level. Similarly, before the 2002 election, the number of women was increased to

17% in both the national and provincial assemblies. As according to Shami (2008)[xii], the quota system would be the most effective way of enhancing the political empowerment of women. Naz et al. (2012)[xiii] found in the study that cultural norms of Pakistani society promote the seclusion of women, often justified through the use of religion. As like, the Council of Islamic Ideology has been liable for some of the most regressive opinion regarding women's legal and social status create huge problems in general and political participation in particular. In January (2016)[xiv], Democracy Reporting International found that women were underrepresented as voters, candidates and election administrators, demonstrating continued compliance gaps with regards to Pakistan's political equality commitments under CEDAW.

The latest situation of women representation in numbers and percentage of Punjab Assembly is given below which clarifies the absence of critical mass from all the hierarchical positions of the Punjab Assembly 2018- 2023.

Category	Female		Male	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Members in the Punjab Assembly	74	19.94	297	80.06
Members in General Seats	7	1.88	289	98.12
Members in Reserved seats for Minorities	1	12.5	7	87.5
Ministers in the Punjab Assembly	4	11.76	30	88.24
Parliamentary Secretaries in the Punjab Assembly	5	11.63	38	88.37

Developed by Author; Source: http://www.gmis.gop.pk[xv]

Challenges and Issues to Women Parliamentarians in Pakistan

The public-private dichotomy defines politics as a male prerogative. The problem is so innate in nature that it considers male dominated field as quite 'natural'; as NCSW in its report (2010)[xvi] describe that, despite the constitutional right, women themselves do not consider politics as their appropriate sphere due to internalization of patriarchal ideologies. Politics is generally perceived by women as 'dirty'. Moreover, because of social perception of women's primary roles as mothers and wives in the reproductive domain, the family and state capitalize fewer resources in increasing women's human capital as compared to men (Awan, 2016)[xvii].

Women are not given equal access to opportunities and resources which result in their dependent social and economic status vis-à-vis men. Moreover, subordinate position of women in the family and society as a result of the public-private divide is the key ideological barrier to women's political participation. (Bano, 2009)[xviii].

Latif et al. (2015)[xix] discussed the issues of less educational qualifications and less independent financial means or social capital faced by women while plan to enter into politics. Another key barrier to women's political participation is the male domination and masculine nature of politics. Above all, Political parties are the doorkeepers to politics. The male leadership of political parties does not treat women workers as their equals. The culture of political parties is highly undemocratic and authoritarian. Most of the parties are run by political dynasties.

Moreover, Rai (2002)[xx] stated that women are not given opportunities to work at the decision-making positions within the party structures. At the time of election, they are not granted party tickets to contest elections. There are less or no opportunities within political parties for women to learn political expertise. Women are not given any financial support by the political parties to run their election campaigns. Women's priorities and concerns are often not reflected in party manifestos. The attitudes of political leadership and the culture of political parties simply mirror the private patriarchy at home. Moreover, the increasing commercialization and criminalization of Pakistani politics is another structural barrier to women's political participation through decision making in government.

According to Adamu 2009 quoted by Ahmed (2013)[xxi], "the gender role ideology is used as an

ideological tool by patriarchy to place women within the private arena of home as mothers and wives and men in the public sphere. This is one of the vital factors that shape the level of women's political participation". According to gender-related socio-political indicators, quoted by Fleschenberg (2008)[xxii] such as the Gender-related Development Index (GDI) and the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM), Pakistan is considered patriarchal and paternalistic in terms of both their gender ideology and political record.

Thus, the overall performance of women political leaders at all levels is weak and ineffective representation result in mere face saving of country's international commitments to empower women politically and promote gender equality in all spheres, including political arena. The current study would explore the major challenges and issues to women parliamentarians of the Punjab Assembly in terms of effective service delivery.

Research Methodology
Qualitative methodology was used for this research. Thematic research technique was utilized to deal with the data collected through IDI (In- Depth Interview). Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect the data. The researcher prepared an interview guide, but also allowed the conversation to flow naturally. Additionally, there was an opportunity for the researcher to go "off-script" and would ask additional questions to the participants to gain greater detail in response.

Population, Sample and Sampling Criteria
All women parliamentarians were considered as the population of the study who was 74 in total according to the provincial assembly Punjab website out of which 66 were elected on reserved seats for women, 7 were elected on general seats and 1 elected on minority seat.

The sample comprised 11 Women parliamentarians. Purposive sampling technique was used to acquire the sample for this study. The women parliamentarians who have at least 50% attendance in assembly sessions in overall tenure. (The rationale behind attendance criteria was that the priority was given to those who at least

did some assembly business during assembly sessions and could better respond to the questions). At least **Four** women parliamentarian of each government and opposition alliance. (The criteria were set for not to get the biased results of the study on either side). So, the sample comprised of 11 women parliamentarians.

Data Collection Tool
An interview guide was established. The interview questions were informed by a comprehensive literature review on challenges faced by women parliamentarians. The interview guide was reviewed by three experts/subject specialists before going to the field. Interview guide was pilot tested and was proved responsive to collect the required data.

Data Analysis
Interviews were audio-recorded with permission of the respondents. The audio-recordings were transcribed verbatim, with minor editing applied to facilitate reading. The transcripts were examined following Braun and Clarke (2006)[xxiii] method of thematic analysis (TA), to identify themes and patterns within the data. Briefly, TA involved six steps i.e. becoming familiar with the data by transcribing the interviews, and then reading the data multiple times. Initial codes were generated across the data set, and then collated into potential themes. A thematic 'map' was formed and ongoing analysis refined the specifics of each theme, with clear definitions and names for the themes generated. Extracts that best represent each theme was identified for inclusion in the discussion and write up of the themes. These extracts were read by experienced academics to achieve consensus concerning the interpretation of the themes and their appropriate classification.

Results and Discussion
Demographics of the respondents
Demographic information of the respondents was collected through the Punjab Assembly official website[xxiv] e.g. their age, education, marital status, political experience, profession, dynastic information whereas parliamentary tasks they performed were gathered through open

parliament website established by one of the leading NGOs working for democracy in the country.

Average age of women parliamentarians, who interviewed, was 50 years. The marital status of all those ladies, were ever married (including widowed and/or divorced who were ever married) with limited information of children as 6 out of 11 members' profile did not contain the information about children.

Many of them had experience of performing political functions as they were in the assembly for 2nd or 3rd term. Only three members who were interviewed, was first time in the assembly. Remaining all had a long experience of either as member of provincial assembly or had a long way from general councilor to district councilor to member provincial assembly Punjab. Education of the women parliamentarians, who interviewed, had a huge variation from middle to matric to B.A to LLB to MA.

Elected women parliamentarians who selected for this research were least keen to share their profession. One interesting observation regarding their profession on the official website of Punjab assembly was that 4 out of 11 did not write any of their profession while two of them considered house wife as their profession (considering their MPA ship not worthy to mention as their profession). However, two of them considered politics as their profession. Moreover, five of them had their political dynastic information in their member's profiles. The average attendance of the selected women parliamentarians was 73%. The overall performance of women parliamentarians who interviewed was so far so good. The 11 women parliamentarians posed 988 starred questions, 170 un-starred questions, 135 point of orders, 34 call attention notices, 46 resolutions, 256 adjournment motions and participated in 181 proceedings and 16 reports. So, in terms of performance they were as good as their male counterparts perhaps far ahead them. Researcher encountered that the women who were in opposition alliance were more active in performance of assembly tasks instead of women of government alliance.

Important issues of women parliamentarians
Four overarching issues were highlighted i.e. males' supremacy in females' political decisions, internalization of womanhood, less education and low self-image. Many sub themes supported these four major themes including joining politics, party choice, mobility, family responsibility, low/ no interest in politics, comprehension issues, unskilled entry, and low self-confidence and self-blaming.

Thematic Map 1: Important issues of women parliamentarians
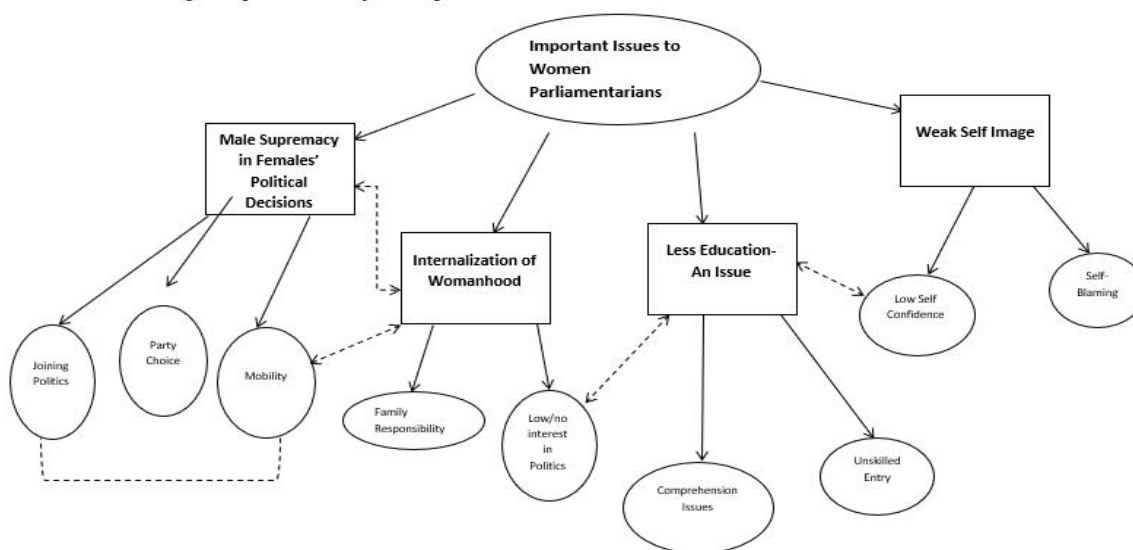
Theme 1: Male supremacy in females' political decisions

Male supremacy is considered a driving tool of society in general with religious underpinning in our country and when it comes to public matters, the effect of male supremacy becomes worsened as the females who socialized in such a familial environment where males get all the powers, withhold to get the power and/or the position of decision making.

Sub theme 1: Joining Politics. The research findings supported the results of previous studies. Even, the decision of joining politics had not been taken on their own by females who interviewed. Every subject, somehow or the other, recounted their family males' potency regarding their presence in the politics. Most of the subjects have their male relations in the same field. So the study would also second the political dynastic culture of the Pakistani polities. The official website of the Punjab Assembly also gives the information regarding the family relations in the politics of women parliamentarians.

One of my interviewees said that "*Father was in politics and supported me to join politics*". Similarly, one female told me the story of joining politics that she "*Decided to come in politics with support of my son and my husband*". Then another female who was B.A., she also claimed "*Father and husband convinced me to become politician*". So, joining politics of females was decided largely by their male family relations, is one of the key findings of the study which may become the issue in their political performance in the assembly.

Sub theme 2: Party Choice. The overarching theme of male supremacy in females' political decisions covered all the issues related to the decisions of female politicians which were influenced by their family males even within the polities and affect their due performance. One of those was party choice. Some of the female politicians were disempowered enough that they have not chosen or joined party on the basis of its agenda or their choice but on the basis of their preference and/or affiliation of the male family members with some party.

One of the respondents told her story as "*Father was in politics and his party was in need of women members so my father gave my name to the party*". Even one of the respondents was still considered herself unfit for the field of politics as she said that she "*forcefully comes to politics by father when condition of B.A (education) was applied and I was the only B.A degree holder in my family. We had a fixed seat in the assembly which my father did not get away with*". So another important decision to join party according to their own choice was taken by the male members of the family. Pakistani polities have a lot such examples in them and Punjab assembly is not the exception.

Sub theme 3: Mobility. Male supremacy in females' mobility is again considered an issue by the study findings as it was also the decision which was taken by the male family members. Moreover, the shocking thing is that the phenomenon is treated as quite normal by the whole society in general including the respondents of the study. The study found that the women who were telling me about their restricted mobility were also considered it as their legitimate right to restrict them and to decide for them where they should go as they know better and/or accompany them where they (Males of the family) did not feel them going safe.

Some of the respondents' views were as followed. "*Husband resisted whenever I travelled out station*". Moreover, the woman felt proud in her son's accompany her everywhere "*My son supported me a lot and was always with me whenever I went outstation*".

The ladies who were very much bound to the family relations would not mobilize enough to play a better role in the assemblies. The ladies who interviewed were judged as better loyal wives but poor political worker as one of those said, "*I limit myself wherever my husband does not allow me to go*". They showed more commitment with the family and its related responsibilities and/or obligations rather than with the political tasks and their performance.

Theme 2: Internalization of Womanhood

The above discussed theme indirectly supported to create another theme which appeared as Internalization of womanhood as a key issue of women parliamentarians. Internalization means that one person is quite familiar with one phenomenon and dealing with that so frequently and practicing that they considered this as normal as natural. So that phenomenon engrained in them.

In our society, oppression of women is so widespread that according to one of my respondents "*being woman means being oppressed*". This leads towards creation of the concept of womanhood in our culture which is silent, quiet and oppressed. The public-private dichotomy lags behind then the concept of womanhood. So that theme named after the concept given by Welter (1978) about the true womanhood. He explained it as "The attributes of true womanhood by which a woman judges herself, and was judged by her husband, her neighbors and society could be divided into four cardinal virtues i.e. Piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity".

Sub theme 1: Family responsibility. Very interestingly, not even a single lady claimed that she preferred her political commitments. All preferred their domestic roles to be performed first and considered the domestic performance as a proof to be considered them good in politics. Although it is against the concept of true womanhood as this concept demanded domesticity and submissiveness while the field of politics demanded courage and free will to take decisions for others for which they are not trained to. So the responses like "*being women my first responsibility is my home*" and "*managed home herself with support of in-laws but yes whenever woman gets step to serve out of home, she has to sacrifice a lot*" were received.

Some responses set another short pattern of family support as "*I managed all my responsibilities of family, in-laws and relatives along with my constituency*" and "*All family and friends did not demand any undue time from me due to my political responsibilities*" and "*Husband was so supportive through all the time. He cared children a lot in my absence*" and "*Yes both family and in-laws were so supportive*" etc. All these verbatim guided me towards same theme that women had internalized the responsibilities attached of being female enough that they considered it a support of family for her to take care of her responsibilities and gave her some spare time to deal with the political tasks which were of secondary importance.

Sub theme 2: Low/No interest. The sub theme has a direct connection with this major theme and a dotted connection with the next theme i.e. less education. I scrutinized it a lot to develop a strong rationale to connect it with this major theme.

When I was collecting my data I observed some of the respondents who were good at education did not perform well in the parliament, had the same womanhood *syndrome* in mind.

They had the logic of their low interest especially in performing the financial tasks were, "*these are males' tasks, let them deal with that stuff*" and "*males are good at budgeting, I did not present any cut motion in the assembly, as I don't think so I am good in all these things*". These statements of the respondents are showing a lack of interest not mainly due to their lack of knowledge but due to their womanhood which demands submissiveness from them to be considered a good woman in the society.

The theme also had a dotted connection with next major theme of less education because some women are really facing the issue due to their lack of knowledge that they did not get interested in some political tasks due to lack of knowledge. The statements are "*I witnessed the people who could not even read the agenda, so they were not interested in sessions*" and "*The decorum of the floor demands the representatives to be educated, parliamentarians without education cannot participate in the assembly sessions, and even they did not use to come in the session*" self-explanatory.

Theme 3: Less education-an issue
We do not have any least education criteria as a requirement to enter into the politics field. So there are a lot of members who do not have even the basic education. Education and political skills are of utmost importance when it comes to tackle the public issues in the assembly.

Subtheme 1: comprehension issues. As per study findings, comprehension of the rules of procedures to comprehension of assembly tasks emerged as a theme. Less education of the parliamentarians resulted in their low or even no comprehension of whatever happening around them. Respondents themselves consider education important for better understanding of the rules of the procedures and for the overall performance of the women parliamentarians.

Many of the respondents gave remarks as "*Yes education is must in politics for understanding parliamentary business*" and "*Only educated can play their due role in assembly. Educated people also prepared themselves to speak on the floor*" which means to take time in the general discussions is

not the easy task as one of my respondents said *"Yes education creates a big difference in active and Inactive MPAs"*. One of the respondents considered unethical to have uneducated people to make policies for the educated ones. *"Although educational criteria is against the democratic lines that the people who cannot even read the agenda, how can participate in the debate of law –making, but preferred for all the members to be educated.* Similarly, one said *"I supported the idea of qualification criteria that should be B.A., understanding of law should also be must because that becomes a big issue sometimes"*.

Theme 2: unskilled entry. Women parliamentarians were all at one step while discussing skills regarding performing parliamentary tasks which were unavailable from any particular forum. Neither political parties nor election commission of Pakistan take any steps to train the prospective members of the assembly as *"Training for doing assembly business must be available which not the case was. No political party worked on it"*. According to respondents *"much importance should be given to have skills to perform parliamentary tasks, otherwise ladies only do "tasbeeh" within the parliament and reply against each question that "I don't know I was doing tasbeeh".* Women parliamentarians claimed that they learnt their skills with experience as *"Skills have learnt after much time spent in the parliament"* and *"I learnt all the skills through my senior party colleagues"* and *"I was totally blank when I first time elected by my party as MPA, I worked hard then and observed my seniors a lot. Sometimes I stopped myself to speak on the floor because of confusion about the process of the assembly"* So to be mastered and skillful in performing parliamentary tasks is a time taking task itself.

Women parliamentarians complained about unavailability of beforehand skill provision in the following comments. *"A lot of trouble I came across without skills of drafting a bill, at last I took the professional help for that on my own expense"* and sometimes ended up in failure as *"Yes, once I tried a lot to submit a bill but that was not technically sound enough to be submitted. I tried a lot, have assistance of many but in vain. So I quit and did not submit the bill"*. So less education couple with unskilled entry of women parliamentarian made their performance low in particular.

Theme 4: weak self-image

Some of the patterns in the data drive me to highlight one of the major issues that women parliamentarians are facing was their weak self-image. This has become a separate theme because it deals with the personality of the parliamentarians. No doubt personality is the outlet of socialization and as living in patriarchal society, the women did not have a groomed self-image. To be aware of oneself is to have a concept of oneself. Baumeister (1999) provides the following self-concept definition: "The individual's belief about himself or herself, including the person's attributes and who and what the self is". I followed this definition to derive the results.

Sub theme 1: Low/no self-confidence. One of the most important personality traits is self-confidence. Majority of my respondents stayed indefinite while responding to this question was my significant finding which actually support the weak self-Image. Although all the respondents considered self-confidence as important element of the sound personality but many women parliamentarian did not consider themselves low in self-confidence. But every woman reported that she witnessed some evidences of women parliamentarians who had no self-confidence at all. *"I consider confidence most important, without which one cannot even sit in the parliament"* and *"I didn't have self -confidence before, then my father groomed me a lot. He accompanied me to the assembly, introduced me with all the secretariat staff. I personally felt that confidence works many times, especially when you are going on air, many colleagues get disturbed because of low confidence"*.

The comments like *"Yes confidence matters a lot, and education contributes a lot in grooming self- confidence. The ladies with less knowledge lost their confidence on the floor and made them a fool"*. Similarly, *"This is pathetic that we have such ladies in the parliament who cannot speak even a single word either due to their ignorance or due to their less confidence"*.

Most of the respondents considered self-confidence as similar to confidence but this is not the case. I used self-confidence as a parameter to assess their conceptual clarity of what they were doing and why they were doing and withstanding their arguments. But unfortunately, no lady came in to this field with a solid vision. That was either accidental or by dynastic pressure or in one case

by the inspirational book of one of the party leaders. No single argument guided about the solid agenda of any women parliamentarian about what actually they were meant for doing in the parliament. So, I claimed this theme as the main issue of women parliamentarians.

Sub theme 2: Self Blaming. A very brief data highlighted this sub theme of self-blaming by women parliamentarians for working as parliamentarians which is still in the acceptance phase as profession for women and still treated as a non-traditional field. Two of my respondents actually provided data which did not come under any other theme or subtheme and compelled me to define it as a separate sub theme. The extracts were: "*In start yes, I faced this problem of blaming myself when my children were small and sometimes, I stuck in my work badly enough to give them time*". And the other said "*I repented a lot, when I missed many of my family's deaths due to my official visits. Once I thought to resign from my political duties when my grandmother expired and I couldn't reach on her funeral*".

The extracts guided me that both ladies were undergone situational crisis and repented upon their choice of politics as a work field which established this fact again that, women parliamentarians were not in the parliament with mindfulness. As I explained earlier in the start of this theme description that self-image should be higher enough not to shatter with some situations or accidents in life which was actually missing from women parliamentarians.

Important challenges to women parliamentarians
Four overarching challenges were highlighted i.e. prejudiced nature of politics, party as a pressure group, negative social perception, and misbehavior of parliamentarians. Many sub themes supported these four major themes including intricate procedures, gender biasness, task segregation, agenda setting, benevolent sexism, and character, and performance, disrespectful behavior of male colleagues and mutual distrust of women parliamentarians.

Thematic Map 2: Important Challenges to women parliamentarians
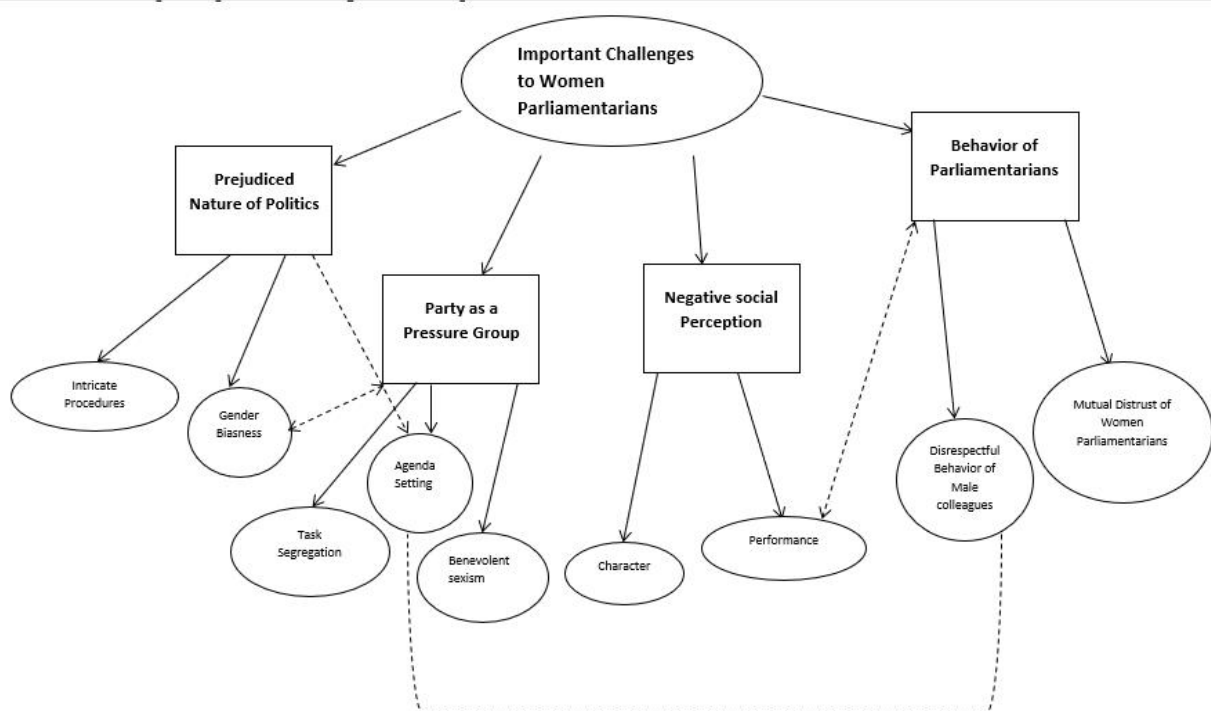
Theme 1: Prejudiced nature of politics
Prejudiced nature of politics was an overarching theme and had two direct sub themes and one dotted (indirect relationship) sub theme. Prejudiced nature of politics used to assist to create two main challenges of intricate procedures and gender biasness which resulted in low

parliamentary service delivery of women parliamentarians.

Sub theme 1: Gender Biasness. One of the important challenges that women parliamentarian facing, was gender biasness. Politics as a field was considered male friendly as they were more in the

parliament in terms of numbers. If we consider the universal rule of majority is authority, it could then be possible to create a rationale of practicing biasness towards female politicians by their male colleagues.

According to my respondents *"Politics is not a tough job if we have a clear vision in our mind. The voice in the parliament is yet important when the suggestions we recommend would incorporate in its true sense, but hierarchies are there for women to follow within the parliament which is purely undemocratic"* and similarly women opined *"Many issues remained sidelined from the agenda just because it was females' agenda"* which highlighted the issue of biasness on the basis of sex alone.

Several times respondents faced gender biasness; as *"I took up the issue of home-based workers but no one was there to stand with me just because I was a woman".* Sometimes they considered themselves even unproductive at all. A very strong point was also pointed out by one of my respondents as below, which was actually depicting the prejudiced nature of politics through gender biasness.

We have a very biased nature of politics towards females who were kept quiet by the male counterparts even the worthy speaker sometimes got biased and did not allow women parliamentarians to speak or cut their time to speech etc.

Many times, it happened that male parliamentarians degraded their female colleagues as *"Males do not take women agenda seriously, they mocked many a times, I personally faced hooting many a times by male as well as female colleagues".*

Sub theme 2: Intricate procedures. It happened several times that the intricate nature of procedures appeared as hurdle for women politicians to perform well in the parliament. Respondents claimed *"We do not have any system at all to follow within the assembly. No true legislation took place within these five years"* and *"Our politics is not result oriented actually. We raise the issue of public interest once, and leave that half done. No comprehensive solution in terms of policies came across".* Women parliamentarians complained about *reference* as a key to unlock the procedural deadlocks. *"Legislative tasks are not complicated if all the parliamentarians did according to the rules of procedure but actually this was not the case, every time you want to submit your business, by using reference. "Reference chalta he".* One of the respondents said,

We are just copy pasting the laws. Many of the parliamentarians are not informed about the problems of their constituencies. Some bill introduced anywhere in the world and we did a copy paste and tried to implement it as it was, which is practically impractical without any alteration according to our own needs, priorities and moral and ethical considerations. I observed very non serious attitude of parliamentarians towards legislation, No serious discussion on policies".

Theme 2: Party as a pressure group
Political parties have a key role to perform in the politics within as well as outside the parliament. But it was observed that sometimes, parties interrupted into the political performance of tasks by parliamentarians and gave undue pressure to parliamentarians to do whatever political parties want to do for them.

Sub theme 1: Task segregation. Party pressurized their members in the parliament either males or females and defined tasks to be performed by females differently from the male counterparts. One thing important to note was that women parliamentarians did not consider this segregation upright as well as accepted.

One of my respondents of government party said, *"One routine government alliance practice was to give their parliamentarians a signal to keep quiet and say yes to all the party policies".* To compel women parliamentarians to be seated in the parliamentary sessions and made the quorum and to allow male members to keep on doing their constituency tasks was again a routine practice.

"80 percent of the assembly business were performed by female parliamentarians, because males wouldn't consider it as important as their constituency's works, their top priority was "chorein ji, halqey k kaam ho jain bs" to get votes in the next election".

Subsequently, women parliamentarians couldn't say no to the tasks assigned by the party as they had to face humiliation regarding their selection on quota by the party. As one woman reported that, *"Party plays a big role actually in case of women on reserved seats often listen and face the remarks like "party ki meherbani" by their male party members, whenever they want to speak for the larger interest of women community".* Similarly, *"Being party worker we collectively cannot go for women agenda, being women minority, we cannot fight for women rights jointly due to party restraints".*

The representatives of public were no more public representatives when they were in the parliament.

They were there meant for party preferences which were hardly derived through real public issues. They themselves accepted, "*Party influenced a lot on all the assembly business through its members. Actually we raise the party agenda on the floor*".

One of my respondents reported the difference between government and opposition tenures of herself regarding party role that,

"*I saw both the government and the opposition tenure and I knew that when we are in the government, we should be more party bound in terms of our speeches on the floor of the house, because Party sometimes binds their members to go beyond the party lines*".

Sub Theme 2: Benevolent sexism. Glick, Fiske, and colleagues (2002) proposed that sexism has two aspects; one of them is benevolent sexism which is defined as having positive attitudes towards women, which in turn actually lead to belittling women, and to their Subservience. And as a consequence of this perception, women are seen as weak, less competent, more in need of protection than men. nonetheless, it can be assumed as favorable trait that is associated with women stereotypically, but actually perpetuate their lower status.

This also became a sub theme of main theme which was party as a pressure group. Because several times women parliamentarians were given a relief in the acknowledgement of their previous work but that would actually prove an avoidance of women members to be the part of those decisions which were of utmost importance, most of the time of financial nature.

"*Financial matters are handled by bureaucracy; Male higher-ups of the party got their deals of development budgets with them. We never become the part of those meetings. Assembly has nothing to do with this business and heavily relied on bureaucracy, and just passed that bill within the assembly. I did not allow to present a cut motion in budgetary meeting with the comments by male party members like "leave these matters madam, why are you working hard on all this stuff as you will not get even a single penny out of it, we are here to see all these things*".

Similarly, one of my respondents said:

"*The budget making function is all fake, "topi drama" nothing else. Even, the suggestions which we submitted in the pre budgetary meetings never be addressed or incorporated in the budget. So, financial policies are not designed and produced within the assembly. No special input is given by me in the budget because that was all predefined*".

Sometimes party save their party members apparently by treating them through benevolent sexism "*party provides a patronage to young parliamentarians*".

Sub theme 3: Agenda Setting. Party as a pressure group controls the agenda of the private members also if they are their party members. The case becomes worsened when party deals with female members. They were not allowed to initiate any private member bill without the consent of the party higher-ups. And of course, party did not put women agenda on top. As one of my respondents said, "*Many issues remained sidelined from the agenda just because it was females' agenda*", and once, "*I took up the issue of home-based workers but no one was there to stand with me from my party just because I was a woman*".

Theme 3: Negative Social perception

Negative social perception has become an overarching theme as women parliamentarians reported very relevant statements to this theme. However, the theme has sub divided in further two dimensions of this theme as negative social perception about character and negative social perception about performance of women parliamentarians.

Sub theme 1: Negative perception about character. Many respondents reported the negative perception of society about the character of the woman parliamentarian. The very reason is again the deep-rooted patriarchal culture in which the woman who worked outside the home was not considered as respectable woman. Women reported comments like "*People do criticize me especially the elder ladies of my family and clan due to my entry in politics*".

"*I faced a lot of scandals from public as well as my male colleagues in my career. People threw a lot of rubbish stuff on me even some of my female colleagues were hesitated while sitting with me but I faced it with courage because I knew I was clear*".

Sub theme 2: Negative perception about performance. The performance of women parliamentarian was the issue that was debated a lot in the society as well as in the media. So, one subtheme was drawn from the overarching theme

of negative social perception about the performance of the women.

Women considered; party was responsible mainly for creating negative perception of the people towards their performance. One of the respondents highlighted the issue as:

"Every time when I went interior city I faced the problem. They called bad names, used curses and pointed fingers on all doings and non- doings of me and my party leadership. Perception of people actually triggered through some big decision by the party either in favor of public or not and public perceived all the members as equally responsible of that decision".

Theme 4: Behavior of parliamentarians

Behavior of parliamentarians was of grave concern. So, it has become an umbrella theme covering two sub themes. One is of disrespectful behavior of male colleagues and the other is named as mutual distrust of women parliamentarians. This was awfully awkward theme that I draw and I was surprisingly shocked about the restless working environment in which women parliamentarians work.

Sub Theme 1: Disrespectful behavior towards women Parliamentarian by Male colleagues.

Women parliamentarians reported dreadful names of them called by the male colleagues. The women parliamentarians reported against the male parliamentarians of Islamic political parties that they did not have acceptance for women to be in the parliament, especially run for election.

"There is no respect in parliament for a woman. Male mindset is just the same in and outside of the parliament to discriminate women. If a woman does competent enough to compete with the males of the parliament, they go for her character assassination. And what a society we have! which admitted abruptly all the stories as truth without investigating. I endured the names like "sweet dish" "trifle" and "kheraati seaton pe bethney wali" from my male colleagues".

Similarly, one of my respondents replied so annoyingly about the behavior of *Molanaa hazraat* that they were *intolerable creature.* "There is no acceptability for women in parliament. Especially for Molvi Hazraat "un k liye aurat ko braabar bithana bht mushkil he", who cannot bear women working side by side with men". And, "Male parliamentarians mocked women parliamentarians many a times.*

Subtheme 2: Mutual distrust of women parliamentarians.

This theme was highlighted accidently when I observed that women avoid talking about other women. When I provoked them, I came up with such data which dragged me towards creating one subtheme dealing with the relationship of women vs. women parliamentarians.

"My (female) colleagues are like taunting machines. Females are so jealous from one another. No one can see others excelling their position within the party. Politics is the other name of leg pulling others and criticize others either willingly or unwillingly".

Another respondent claimed that *"Females were more with mal- intentions than males within the assembly".* Another important finding of the study was that female politicians did not support junior colleagues, as reported:

"No woman either of my own party or of the other party encouraged their junior female colleagues on good participation in the session, afterwards. The situation is vice versa in males. They do encourage the new comers' males on their participation in assembly business".

Strategies to overcome Issues and challenges of women parliamentarians

Two broad themes were highlighted i.e. Government commitments and private member strategies. Many sub themes supported these two main themes included international commitments of the government and national commitments of the government, private hiring of advisors and paid help by secretariat staff.

Thematic Map 3: Strategies to overcome issues and challenges of women parliamentarians
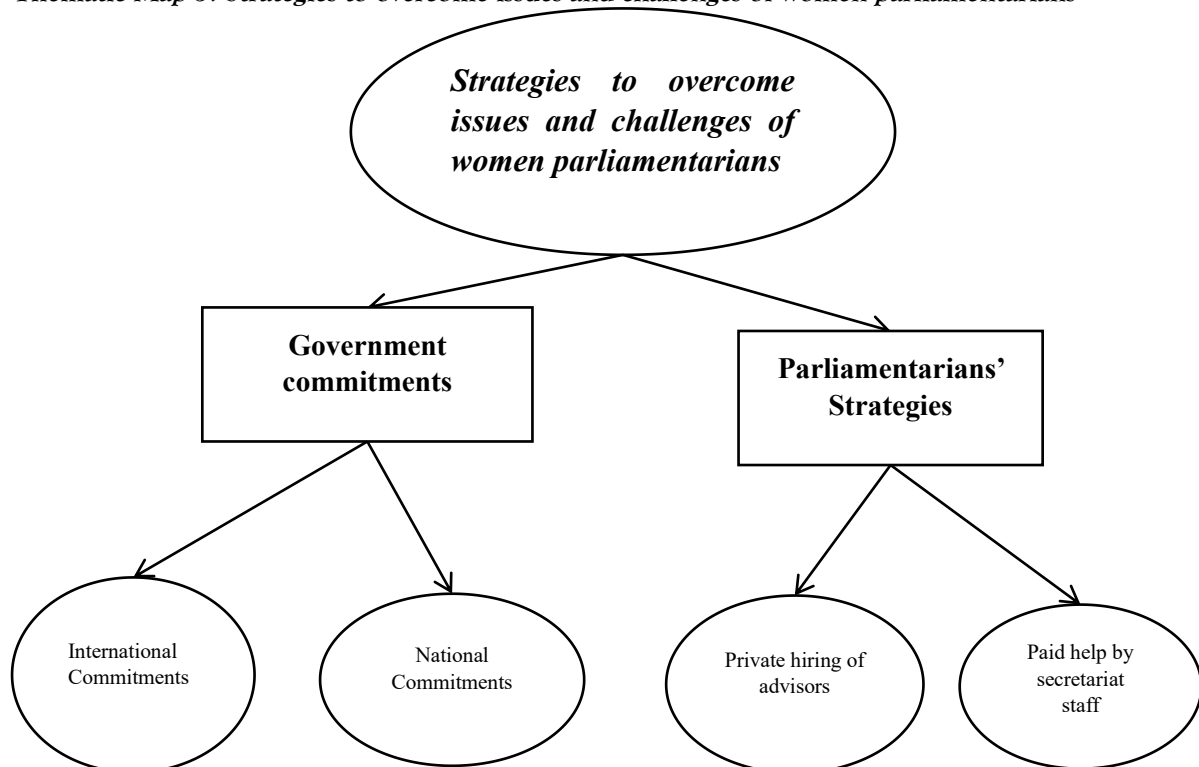
Theme 1: Government Commitments

Punjab government considered its prime responsibility to reduce the challenges of parliamentarians. For this purpose, Punjab Assembly connected with a lot of international as well as national forums to enhance their capacity of working.

Sub Theme 1: International engagements.
International commitments of the Punjab Assembly helped a lot in arranging Study visits to House of Commons, west-minister and Scottish parliament under Westminster Foundation for Democracy. Similarly, Australia Awards Pakistan Programme for short courses on effective and efficient management of parliamentary committees.

As above Assembly has the collaboration with Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, European Union's Project 'SUBAI', Pakistan Institute of parliamentary services, Democracy Reporting International for capacity building of parliamentarians.

Sub theme 2: National engagement. Punjab assembly provided an open platform for civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations to contribute in capacity building of the parliamentarians. Civil society organizations' role is remarkable in terms of lobbying and help

parliamentarians in bill development. Moreover, they gave training on parliamentary tasks especially bill development.

The NGOs are performing very well indeed, helped a lot e.g. DRI for Networking and relationship. *"I was so surprised when CSO gave us training about assembly tasks and almost all the MPAs who got training were better in their performance afterwards".*

Another women parliamentarian said,
"I witnessed their work for labour laws, highlighting the issues of home-based workers, sanitation issues, livestock issues, health and hygiene issues etc., so we cannot deny their role of pressure building as a strong interest group for sustainable development".

Women parliamentarians admired the Young Parliamentary Associates Programme, who provided trained and well-informed interns for their help in performing parliamentary tasks through providing assistance in drafting of bills etc.

Theme 2: Parliamentarians' Strategies

Women parliamentarians had some strategies as private members to deal with their issues and challenges which included two main strategies one was private hiring of advisors and the other was paid help by secretariat staff.

Sub Theme 1: Private hiring of advisors. Women parliamentarians reported some of the strategies they personally devised to get some help in performing their political tasks. As one woman reported, *"They (private legal advisor) gave me assistance in start of my career".* Secondly, some women reported the other ladies using the assistance of private assistance. As *"I personally know a lady who hired a private assistant for doing all the legislative business".*

Sub Theme 2: Paid help by secretariat staff. Somehow or the other, women got the services of secretariat officials and staff for their legislative tasks by giving them illegitimate money. As one parliamentarian reported that, *"Women parliamentarians hired their assistants even from the secretariat, privately, give money to them from their own pocket and do all assembly business through them, and get their names on the top performers".*

Findings and Discussion

Male supremacy is considered a driving tool of society in general with religious underpinning in our country even in the familial institution where it comes as obvious as food for living. Headship of the family is held by males of the family which consequently give also the decision-making power to males of the family. The decision of joining politics had not been taken on their own by females who interviewed. Most of the subjects have their male relations in the same field. So, the study would also second the political dynastic culture of the Pakistani polities.

The study found that the women who were telling about their restricted mobility were also considered it as their (males) legitimate right to restrict them and to decide for them where they should go as they know better and/or accompany them where they (Males of the family) did not feel them going safe. So, "Internalization of womanhood" is a key issue of women parliamentarians. Moreover, Education and political skills are of utmost importance when it comes to tackle the public issues in the assembly. Women parliamentarians complained about unavailability of trainings regarding assembly business.

Some of the patterns in the data drive to highlight weak self-image of women parliamentarians. One of the important challenges that women parliamentarian facing, was gender biasness.

Women parliamentarians complained about *reference* as a key to unlock the procedural deadlocks. Party pressurized their members in the parliament either males or females and defined tasks to be performed by females differently from the male counterparts. Several times women parliamentarians were given a relief in the acknowledgement of their previous work but that would actually prove an avoidance of women members to be the part of those decisions which were of utmost importance, most of the time of financial nature.

Women parliamentarians reported dreadful names of them called by the male colleagues. The women parliamentarians reported against the male parliamentarians of Islamic political parties that they did not have acceptance for women to be in the parliament, especially run for election.

Suggestions

- This is important to create a gender specialist post in the assembly functionaries whose job description will to analyze and remove the gender disparities from the assembly functions which will ultimately reduce the challenges faced by women parliamentarians while delivering assembly functions.
- Secondly, tangible actions should be taken to amend the rules of procedures to make these more "user friendly" as this was complained by many of the women respondents that it took a long time (6 months on average) to be familiar with the rules of procedures.
- Thirdly, steps should be taken by the government, for gender sensitive training for the assembly staff on regular basis. Moreover, Gender sensitive trainings should be organized for all the politicians irrespective of gender.
- Fourthly, non-governmental organizations should take initiative to enhance the capacity of male as well as female politicians for effective service delivery.
- Fifthly, the curriculum of the country should be revisited for incorporating the political activism at all levels of education and remove gender biases and present politics as gender neutral field so that the

deficit for female models in this particular field may reduce.

Last but not least, female politicians are specifically and women of society in general should take this as their own responsibility to enhance their political capacity by knowing their roles and responsibilities as potential change agents/ voters in general and as women politician in particular.

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