

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN: A POLICY PERSPECTIVE ANALYSIS IN PAKISTAN

Kamran

Lecturer, Department of Pakistan Studies, Abbottabad University of Science and Technology, Abbottabad.

Email: kamrankhankpk001@gmail.com

Saira Bano

Lecturer, Department of Pakistan Studies, Hazara University Mansehra.

Email: sairabano@hu.edu.pk

Muhammad Naveed Akhtar

Assistant Professor, Department of History and Political Science, Ghazi University Dera Ghazi Khan.

Email: mnakhtar@gudgk.edu.pk

Abstract

The problems surrounding political participation of women have gained huge attention of political and academic forums in the recent years. Several countries, thus, have generally focused on increasing women's participation in politics through inclusion of quotas in electoral and political processes. To address this concern, a number of countries has went through a process of legislation. Nonetheless, Pakistan is one of those countries which has consistently shown a polite and laid-back attitude to women's issues. This appears that the process of participatory policy formulation has not been taken up with respect to women empowerment. This paper attempts specifically to address the policy-making process and environment regarding the political participation of women in Pakistan. This inquires gender-neutral policies which help women gain an equal opportunities of participation in development. The study demonstrates and underscores that women's meaningful political engagement is ensured by their involvement in the policy-making process. It further elaborates that Pakistan's political system gave women a place thanks to its efforts to gender equality, such as its quota system. To construe this discussion, the normative approach is employed to elaboration the qualitative data, yet to explain political participation of women some quantitative data also becomes a part of discussion.

Keywords: Democracy, quotas, political participation, policy-making, gender discrimination and women empowerment.

Introduction

The women across the world, for multiple reasons, are not treated equal to men in their rights and status. Due to limited access to the services and control over resources, women are deprived. Pakistani society is diverse socially as well as culturally. Women make up around 48% of overall population of Pakistan, but due to the male dominance and gender bias policies, they are considered to be a minority segment of society. Owing to such a culture milieu, mostly women are unable to use their abilities, potential and talents freely, and they remain repressed. One of the biggest challenges for women is finding resources to empower them. A way for them to take advantage of opportunities that influence the policies of national and international provide for their development. It is important that a society that claims to be progressive, and democratic, must ensure the women's political participation.

Women's empowerment depends on the type of government, the interests, and the priorities of the leaders. For the democratic governance system, equal political participation of women is imperative. However, women remain ignored, and thus depressed, segment and could not get chance for effective participation in political system because of institutional barriers, restrictive and rigid laws, discriminatory cultural practices and limited access and control to resources and facilities.

As a significant part of society, women have the right to participate in civil society, to be elected to form government system, to vote in elections, to hold important positions and to have a voice in the decision-making that ultimately affect them. It will affect their communities and their families. Furthermore, the country believes that good, democratic governance requires democracy, inclusion and the equal participation of all people, which is essential for viable improvement and development. So far, women have largely participated as corporate leaders, legislators, political party leaders, and ministers, and got engaged in civil society activities. Despite these positive developments and various other initiatives such as national and international agreements, conventions and strategic frameworks and legislation to guide women as a portion of democratic incorporation, there is still a huge gap in the political arena for gender equality and equality and recognize the right to participate in politics.

Apropos of political participation, women have to face numerous difficulties in political, socioeconomic and cultural arena. These categorical obstacles discourage women for political participation which in turn limits their interests, willingness and capacity to participate in decision making. Therefore, the encouraging atmosphere in public circles and the level of participation of women in party activities is lower than that of men.

Policy is directly concern with the behavior of actors in decision making in achieving rational outcomes. A political scientist, James E. Anderson defines that public policy means the allocation of resources to respond the perceived problems of public and a course of actions of government for dealing the problems. The content

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN: A POLICY PERSPECTIVE ANALYSIS IN PAKISTAN

and scope of public policies varies in countries based upon the ideology and governmental system. As compared to the developed countries the spectrum of public policies in developing countries is broad because of high expectations from government. Pakistan is a colonial creation and heterogeneous state. Thus, various interests are challenging for supremacy and power in its political structure. Hence, policymaking pattern influence by the powerful groups or institutions. As Pakistan is one of patriarchal states, in most cases men influence the policy processes for their benefits.

Research Methodology

The methodology according to which the discourse is dealt with is descriptive, analytical and normative. The nature of study-data is dominantly qualitative. The data is collected from various books, encyclopedias, research articles, reports and newspapers to find the answer of the research questions. Some of quantitative data showing the women political representation and participation is also given focus which is presented through charts and diagram.

Literature Review: Women Political Inclusion

The literature review provides the debate about women political inclusion in political system of Pakistan. Then it goes to explore the historical evolution of policies, constitutional provisions, institutional mechanism and framework of for gender equality.

Women Inclusion in Parliament: Impediments

In Pakistan women face several obstacles for inclusion in politics. They have very limited access and control over opportunities and resources. However, these barriers vary across the provinces and over time. Women who find opportunity to participate in politics face hostile and unfriendly environment with regard to cultural, political, public and social environment. History reveals that the decision-making body in political system reflects that how much women face challenges in shaping and articulating their interests in form of policies.

Nadezdha Shvedova (2005) categorizes the barriers for participation of women in political system in three domains. These are as socio-economic, political and cultural. Socio-economic barriers are related to the socio-economic status of women. This means that women have limited access and control to financial resources. This is one of important barrier to women for their participation in politics. Along with financial constraints, there are other challenges career, as well as the double burden of household duties and professional duties.

Shvedova (2005) states that political barriers are the most important obstacles to women in their political participation. Political participation is about the choice to cast vote, right to context election and engagement in decision making. The right to contest election guarantees the candidacy of women, which is the initial step towards

increasing the participation of women. Increasing the female candidacy allows the right to vote. Hence, the restrictions on women to contest election lead to men high representation and create hurdles in political participation to women. Prominent features that crumples women political participation such as masculine model of political system, lacking of financial assistance, lack of access to network of politics, limited cooperation from other public organizations and landscape of electoral process that may or may not favorable to women.

Cultural obstacles are outcomes of the traditional and cultural participation of women in society. Customarily, women are deeming to stay within walls of house, restricted their role as mother or caretakers only. (Shvedova, 2005).

Women in Parliaments: World Average

The best democracy is acknowledged to be the one in which each gender is afforded equal rights and opportunities in their daily lives as well as across the political spectrum of the nation. Although women represent almost half of population of Pakistan but their participation in leadership cadre of political parties is considerably below the average.

Pakistan, nonetheless, comes in third among the ranks of South Asian nations for the representation of women in parliament.

Women representation (average) in world

Countries	Lower House			Upper House		
	Total Members	Women members	%	Total Members	Women members	%
Afghanistan	249	69	28%	68	18	26%
India	542	64	12%	245	27	11%
Pakistan	342	70	20%	104	19	18%
Maldives	85	5	6%	----	----	----
Bangladesh	350	71	20%	----	----	----
Nepal	165	6	4%	----	----	----
Sri Lanka	225	13	6%	----	----	----
Bhutan	47	4	9%	25	2	8%

In the current parliament of Pakistan total 70 seats of women are there (60 reserved, 9 general and one of minority seat). Hence the total representation of women in house of 342 is 20.46%.

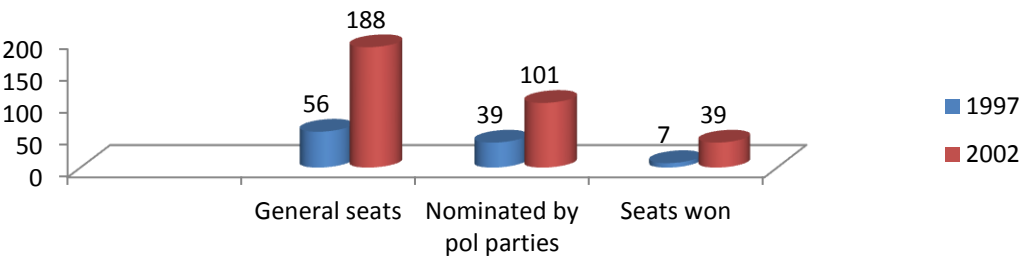
In Pakistan, limited access and control to services and other life quality

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN: A POLICY PERSPECTIVE
ANALYSIS IN PAKISTAN

indicators reflects a large inequality between women and men. However, with regard to women political participation, the 21st century witnessed for considerable development. Most importantly, women participation increased in number in legislative domains. This development in politics domain occurs due to international commitments of Pakistan which includes: Despite of this, Pakistan Constitution of 1973 also emphasized significantly for political uplift of women. Furthermore, the 2002 Election Commission (EU) Ordinance are the pushing factors to increase number of women in political system of Pakistan. Historically in Pakistan women participation in national and provincial assemblies remained different under different political systems.

Quotas system introduced to increase women participation in politics, through this approach woman can get chance of inclusion in political system. This approach was in line through different course of policy actions. Nevertheless, on basis on different experiments in the world depicted that affirmative policy actions always give productive results in the system.

During the era of 1947 to 1956, state head was governor general. In the second legislative assembly, the representation of women was 0%, none of women acquired seat out of total 80 seats. The political structures of Pakistan once again change from 1956 to 1958. The post of governor general replaced as president. The military ruled the polity structure of Pakistan for upcoming 13 years, from 1958 to 1971. After the duration of Zia rule in another shift changes occurred for women political representation. Women reserved quotas increased from 3% to 10% in



legislative assembly along with 5% of the seats in the provincial assemblies by 1988. However, the reserved seats for women lapsed during the era from 1990 to 1997. None of the seat allocated to women in assemblies in 1990 elections, 1993 and 1997. Consequently, there were only 2 women out of 217 whom were elected directly in elected assembly of 1990. In elected assembly of 1993 only 4 women elected directly and for 1997 only 6 women were elected.

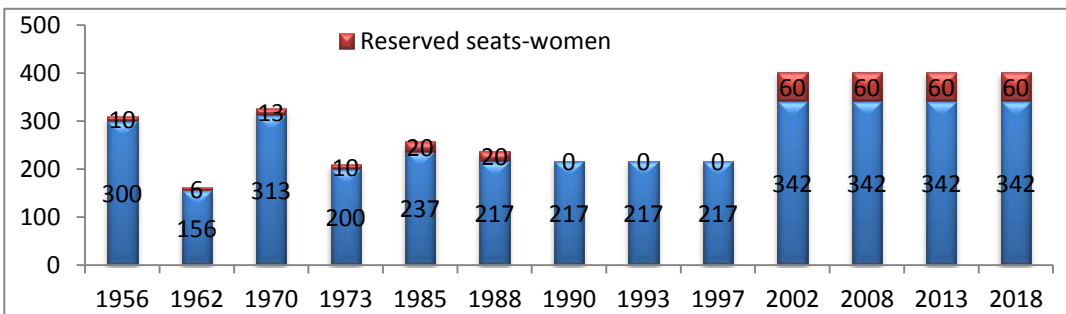
Graph 1 – Women participation in 1997 vs. 2002

In 2002, former president of Pakistan Parvez Musharraf took the landmark decision regarding the women representation in political system. Representation of women increased in local governance up to 33% and 17% in the national governance structure. That step enhanced the country with regard to Gender Empowerment Measurement and also improved Pakistan position in the Human Development Index. Before election of 2002, the seats were increased up to 17% in national and provincial assemblies.

However, the participating ratio of women in the elections of 2008 and 2013 remained in swinging trend. In election of 2013, out of total 342 seats women acquired 70 in national assembly which represent almost 20.5% of the total seats. In senate 17 women elected out of 100 total seats which become 17%. The comparison election of 2008 reflects the improved participation of women in politics of election 2013. In election of 2008, political parties nominated total 34 women in election whereas in 2013 election 36 women got nomination. The women participation in national assembly in 2018 election reflects the 20.46% total representation of women of 342. There are 70 women Members in the house, out of which only sixty seats were reserved, general were nine and one on a minority seat. In the upper house there were total 19 senators seats for women, 2 general reaming reserved seats. Hence total 18.26% of the total representation in the senate which comprise 104 members.

Women representation through Reserved Seats in the parliamentary history of Pakistan as shown below.

Graph 2: Women reserved seats (1956-2018)



Policy environment perspectives – Developing countries

Number of researchers presented basic three dimensions to facilitate discussion regarding the policy environment as below:

- External perspective
- Internal perspective
- Contingency perspective

External Perspective

External perspective states that the developing nations impassively receive the policies from the developed states such as through international organizations and financial institutes like IMF, USAID, World Bank etc. Thus, the policies do not

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN: A POLICY PERSPECTIVE ANALYSIS IN PAKISTAN

reflect the views or opinions of citizens but external factors influence the policy perceptions. This perception reflects as finding the solution for the problems identified as per Garbage Cane Model.

Internal Perspective

The internal political structure, administrative and cultural patterns present confrontations to the external policy decisions. This perspective argues that the developing countries not simply punching bags for external policy decisions, they also made their own choices. The political decisions of a country mainly influenced by its own administrative and management style including cultural and political pattern.

Institutional/Contingency Perspective

Neither external nor internal perspective narrates the diverse realities of policy development in underdeveloped countries. It is argued that both the internal and external point of view represent a drastic simplification of the extremely complex process of formulating public policy. In fact, the policy formulation and decision-making process influenced by number of factors like procedures, the institutional practices, norms and culture of organizations. There are various factors involve in determining the policy environment as:

- *The nature of policy issues*
- *Administrative and political traditions*
- *Policy analysis capacity*
- *Political leadership*
- *Style of governance*

Historical Evolution of Public Policy in Pakistan

Literature review reflects that public policies provide support to the governmental agencies in solving the public problems. Since the establishment of Pakistan, ruling governments could not adopt the sustainable mechanism for public including women oriented public policies. Each elected government has a manifesto on which the citizens rely for voting. Hence the leading party forms government which remains responsible for the formulation of policies to solve the public problems. Here in Pakistan the case is different mostly, the elected government focused their own interests and make changes in structure to fulfill their preferences instead of public.

The historical perspective reflects that military and civil bureaucracy, judicial institutions, political institutions, international organizations and external factors are the key players in shaping public policy making environment in Pakistan (Bashir, 2013).

Although the government is democratically elected, there is no leadership and people-centered policy-making approach with citizen participation in both the federal and provincial governments of Pakistan. Furthermore, in Pakistan the policy processes are not bottom to top encompassing the citizens' opinions regarding public

policy issues. As result public confidence could not be built on governmental institutes.

Throughout the world, in democratic system governmental agencies perform key roles in formulation and implementation of any policy. In addition, the administrative procedures ensure credibility in processes of policy framework. But if the administrative personals lack capacity and performs comparatively not good (Shafqat, 2014).

In country, the policy framework has been conducted in either a civilian government or military control, in both cases, it is influenced by men. In Pakistan, Public policies processes are masculine and reflect the aspirations of the policy makers. Policy spectrum suffers because of various problems like, inadequate policy goals, lack of social acceptability, corruption at wider level, lack of vision and leadership and considerable gap among the public and institutions, undemocratic practices, men dominancy and lack of accountability in implementation etc. Moreover, lack of confidence of citizens on public policies by government, corruption and dualist nature of legal system.

Generally, and in line with Agagu (2010:21), Policy environment in Pakistan can be described by four dimensions. First is about the formulation of policy and adoption. Second is about the implementation of policies. Third is about the political and socio-economic context and fourth is regarding to the obtrusive global context.

Institutional Mechanisms and Policy Implementation

The national mechanism of Pakistan regarding women development is undermined within the bureaucratic organization and paraphernalia. It consists of male dominated environment; numbers of central positions are held by men from retired military men and civil service. Its main role is about the policy making but presently its role is restrictive as it lacks the influential role in carrying out the legislative agenda by parliament. Women development ministry, due to numerous constraints lacks capacity to implement National Plan of Action 1998, National Policy for Women Empowerment and Advancement 2002 and CEDAW. Governmental machinery lacks the mechanism for maintaining gender segregated data in economic and social sectors for assessing the economic contributions of women in labor force. Moreover, comprehensive strategies not in place to manage the gender segregated data of voter turnout of women in all areas of Pakistan.

Public policies for women & framework for gender quality

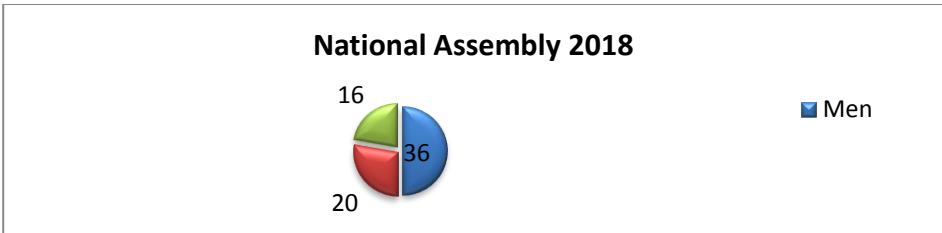
Gender discrimination in the political system regarding women deprives them of contribution in decision making. Women's right to equality has always been denied because of socio-cultural principles. The Ministry of Women's Development developed the CEDW for the advancement and empowerment of women at the policy level. According to the plan, steps were taken to improve the status of women in decision-making at all levels. Empowering a number of women legislations enacted by

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN: A POLICY PERSPECTIVE
ANALYSIS IN PAKISTAN

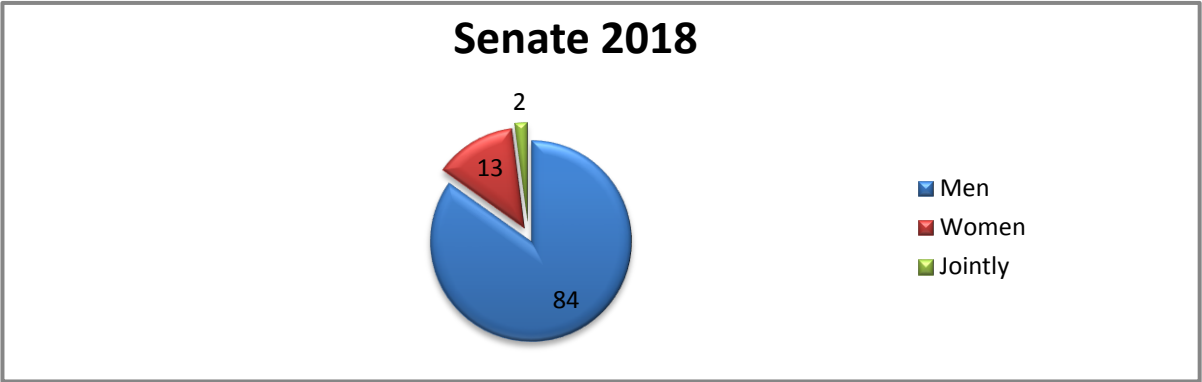
the state machinery to eliminate discrimination against women, such as the Prevention of Women Act, 2011, the Acid Crime Prevention Bill 2011, Women in the Workplace 2010 Protection Bill and Criminal Law 2010.

Parliament of 2018 depicts the detail below. The people in law making agencies express their opinion on certain issues/topic through resolutions and presents recommendations. Following graphs shows the gender differences in parliament of 2018 with regard to their voice. In the Senate total 99 resolutions passed, out of which only 13 initiated by women and in national assembly out total 72 only 20 initiated by women as reflected in Graph 3 & 4

Graph 3: Resolution in National Assembly 2018



Graph 4: Resolution in Senate 2018



In governance structure, there are lack of gender friendly policies which includes inappropriate schedules of meetings, not availability of child care facilities during work hours and supportive environment is key hurdles that limits the effective women participation. Apart from mentioned, male colleagues also dominate debates/discussions by pushing women views aside.

State machinery needs to practice gender-oriented decision making and leadership in their system. Furthermore, need to demonstrate the gender equitable working environment and culture in institutes.

Conclusion

Women involvement in policy making process is perquisite for the meaningful participation in political system. The policy outcome determines the position of

women in the society. Provision of political rights to women is the key to ensure equality and leads to democratic governance. Constitutional reforms and a change of mindset and attitudes towards the ideal society in which we live can be achieved, and bring such a positive socio-political change is the common responsibility of leadership as well as the general mass, at all levels. Thus, the existing systems and structures regarding policy formulation are not gender sensitive as it should be. The gender-oriented policies empower women in sphere of life. The Pakistan governmental agencies designed number of policy actions to cope up the challenges facing by women for inclusion in decision making setup. However, a vast room exists related to their restricted and inactive participation. An individual interest is best protected when meaningful participation is ensured. Hence it is suggested that the scope for policy making be enlarged and women's participation be made a state policy towards accelerating active and effective participation of women in political system of Pakistan. For inclusive democracy, all citizens regardless of gender, class, creed, religion and ethnicity need to be part of political process.

So as to ensure positive results regrading sensitive gender policy issues, the various agencies intending to promote rights, status and empowerment of women – such as academia, local communities; government, civil societies, media, international agencies and the private sector – need to work in collaboration. International entities need to play their role to influence the gender-oriented policies at all level. Clear guidelines should be developed for implementation and practice of affirmative measures that pave way to empower women and build their capacity to play effective role in society for gender equality and social change. In the light of literature on women's political participation, the discussion above shows that gender quota is the main factor behind improving political status of women in Pakistan's politics. Gender quotas are paving the way for greater participation of women in politics by removing various barriers that keep women out of politics. There, nonetheless, is a dire need of ensuring equal visibility of women politicians and acquiring their role in decision making process and promoting them for greater leadership involvement. Support women's leadership in the workplace by maximizing participation in executive positions and corporate boards. Governments should enact laws and implement accountability mechanism and policies that monitor and report on government performance on gender equality commitments.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

References

1. Anderson, J.E. (1997) Public Policy Making: An Introduction, 3rd Ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
2. Community Information Empowerment and Training

**POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN: A POLICY PERSPECTIVE
ANALYSIS IN PAKISTAN**

- (CIET) and Devolution Trust for Community Empowerment (DTCE) (2004). Social Audit of Governance and Delivery of Public Services, Pakistan. <https://www.ciet.org/> (Accessed on June 18, 2020)
3. Dolowitz, D. P. and Marsh, D. (1996) „Who Learns What from Whom? A Review of the Policy Transfer Literature“, *Political Studies*, 44 (2), 343–57
4. Gender, Women, and Democracy. The National Democratic Institute. 28 May. 2019. <https://www.ndi.org/gender-women-democracy>. (Accessed on June 28, 2020)
5. Khalid, H.S. and E.M. Mukhtar. The Future of Girls Education in Pakistan. A Study on Policy Measures and other Factors Determining Girls Education.
6. Inter-Parliamentary Union (2016). “Women in National Parliaments” Retrieved: <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm> (Accessed on June 8, 2020)
7. Islam, N. (2001). Democracy and governance in Pakistan's fragmented society. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 24(12), 1335-1355.
8. Legislative quotas for women, Aurat Publication and Information Service Foundation. July 2012.
9. Mahbulul-Haq Research Center.(2016). Human Development in South Asia 2016: Empowering Women in South Asia. Lahore University of Management Sciences.
10. Nikolaos. Z. (2003). Ambiguity and Choice Unpublicized Policy: Political Decision Making in Modern Democracies: Georgetown University Press.
11. Pakistan Second to last in global gender equality report, Express Tribune, with the International New York Times.
12. Qureshi, R. & Ravieya F.A.J. Gender and Education in Pakistan, Oxford University Press inc.UK, London. (2007).
13. The Female Political Career – Women in Parliaments Global Forum and the World Bank (2015). [https://www.womeninparliaments.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Final_13012015_The-Female-Political-Career .pdf](https://www.womeninparliaments.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Final_13012015_The-Female-Political-Career.pdf) (Accessed on June 8, 2020)
14. UN Women. (2016). Women’s Economic Participation and Empowerment in Pakistan: Status Report.
15. United Nations Development Program (UNDP) (2008). ‘UNDP Gender Equality Strategy 2008-2011’, New York, UNDP.
16. Yusuf, H. (2013). The Evolving Role of Women in Pakistani Politics. NOREF Expert Analysis.

17. Women in Parliament of Pakistan
<http://www.na.gov.pk/en/content.php?id=75> (Accessed on June 8, 2020).
18. World Bank. (2005). Pakistan Country Gender Assessment, Washington, D.C: The World Bank.
19. Abbasi, D. A. H., & Jaffar, S. (2021). Islamization of Zia Regime: An Appraisal from Gender Perspective . *Al-Duhaa*, 2(02), 17-28. <https://doi.org/10.51665/al-duhaa.002.02.0074>