

Empowering Change of Women in Pakistan

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INTRODUCTION

Women are the backbone of society, and without them, society cannot function properly. However, the social structures of the world constantly place women in second place. It is also true that women are becoming more prominent in society's development efforts nowadays and are regarded as the society's founders. Providing social, political and economic possibilities to empower women and advance their advancement is crucial for the positive growth of society. It is via the process of empowerment that one gains the ability to act that determines a person's rank and place in society. Women's empowerment is not a target, rather, it plays a key role in promoting societal growth on the social and political fronts. Women's empowerment is a process that encourages women to realise their own strength. Women's empowerment is a comprehensive notion that encompasses economic, social and political empowerment (Nelasco, 2012). Beyond the idea of a person being self-reliant as an entrepreneur, Jhon Friedmann provides a much deeper definition of empowerment by including three separate facets of power to access, including social, political and psychological factors (Friedmann, 1993). The notion of women's empowerment is mainly elaborated by scholars and analysts in different fields. These analysts provide a thorough analysis of political, economic and social empowerment. Few of them and they exclusively talk about Indian women in South Asia, explain the state of women's empowerment there. Others discuss the social and economic standing of women in the South Asian area, the cultural restrictions they face, and the patriarchal

nature of society.

Many social and political philosophers now focus their disputes on the South Asian area. Women's empowerment is a topic that is receiving a lot of attention, and the South Asian region cannot avoid it. The possession of intellectual and material resources by empowered women makes them autonomous and self-reliant. Empowering women via education is essential for the nation's social and economic growth. Women's engagement should encompass more people-oriented programmes and processes of employment policies rather than just being about assimilating them into present development models by expanding their numbers. There are more women than males in the world. However, because of the concept of male domination, women are unable to get equal rights in many regions of the world. Thankfully, feminist philosophy has been becoming stronger in recent years, leading to better conditions for women. The provision of basic education is the main goal of all movements working for women's rights since access to basic education is one of the core concerns of women's rights (Abrar-ul-haq and others, 2017).

Women's Status in Pakistan:

Despite making up 59 percent of Pakistan's 160-million-person population, women are cast in a supporting role due to the widening gender gap. Although women's role as equal members of society has been only partially recognised in certain regions. However, a significant barrier to women's emancipation is still the stark gender gap against them. The federal and provincial governments have already taken a number of legislative and executive

actions involving gender issues, yet discrimination against Pakistani women continues in all forms. The fundamental reason is that patriarchal thinking, outmoded customs, and cultural standards continue to hold sway even in this day and age, when demands on society and women have dramatically altered. The commission of inquiry for women's report from 1997 noted that socioeconomic statistics suggested that discriminatory laws and practises were growing the gap between men and women in virtually all significant industries. The research also observed an increase in some types of violence against women as well as a clear rise in some of the challenges women experience when it comes to their legal standing (Sharma, 2003).

Even though discrimination against women is a worldwide problem, Pakistan needs specific attention in order to empower women (Bushra and Wajiha, 2015). In both its normative and existential orders, Pakistani society is hierarchical and demonstrates uneven power relations between men and women, with women being put beneath males (Rahman and others, 2018). It is a non-egalitarian culture where gender equality and women's emancipation seem like distant goals since there are considerable gender differences (Raza and Murad, 2010).

The available research makes it easy to see the gender discrepancy that these measurements indicate. For instance, Pakistan has far lower rates of female employment than male employment (25% vs. 82%, respectively). In addition, just 26.7% of adult women had completed secondary school, compared to 47.3% of men. Low educational possibilities and low academic accomplishment also contribute to low levels of empowerment among women, especially those who reside in rural regions of the nation. The problem is made worse by the fact that Pakistani female lawmakers appear to be constrained by patriarchal ideals and norms when they might be empowered. In these conditions, the idea of empowerment in Pakistan seems to be purely conceptual, lacking any sense of actualized application (Chaudhry and Nosheen, 2009).

Women Empowerment in Pakistan:

Pakistan's constitution guarantees gender equality for both men and women by prohibiting gender-based discrimination (Equality of Citizens, 2012). Along with equality laws, political language regarding women's security and empowerment has also been utilised to

represent women as holding equal roles in all spheres of life. However, this language is largely fiction and fabrication, and as a result, many academics believe that the legislation is little more than a piece of paper with no practical bearing on the lives of women. Due to persistent conventional thinking and patriarchal attitudes, the political, social, and economic condition of women in Pakistan is actually just as dire as it is in other states (Muneer, 2018). The legal facets of Pakistan's system for women must now be explained. Although Pakistan's constitution certainly permits women to take full part in politics, theoretically men and women are still segregated as a result of different socioeconomic development levels (Latif and others, 2015). Older laws supporting women were in existence, but they had little effect because of societal custom. It's interesting to note that a thirteen-person committee was established in Pakistan in 1976 to safeguard women's rights.

There are 60 designated seats for women in the National Assembly, yet there are currently 69 women sitting in them, indicating that Pakistan has apparently given women additional political rights. In a similar vein, there are only seventeen reserved seats in Pakistan's senate, compared to the twenty seats held by women. The steadfast oppositional attitude, which is not readily changed, has prevented women from achieving equal rights and positions in Pakistan's political, economic and social environment, despite a rise in the number of women in parliament. Pakistan Vision 2025 has five elements of women's empowerment built into its goals, according to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), including initiatives that support women's self-worth, the freedom to make their own decisions, access to opportunities and resources, the right and ability to control their lives, both inside and outside of the home, and the capacity to affect social change (UNFPA, Pakistan).

Given these advancements, it is clear that Pakistan is making constant attempts to empower women. But not all women may access this ostensibly favourable setting. In reality, due to limitations placed on girls and women by families, relatively few women can take use of these chances. Given the current circumstances, it would not be incorrect to state that the status of women in Pakistan differs greatly between the top and lower classes as well as between urban and rural populations as a result of the negative effects of tribal society and inequitable socioeconomic development (Gender Concerns International). Another conundrum occurs

when international assistance and legislation conflict with Pakistani national laws. The application of international rules like the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is impractical. CEDAW mandates that nations prohibit gender inequality and abuses of women's rights as well as defining discrimination against women specifically. Similar to this, female politicians are not fully protected by the political system. Traditions, ingrained sexism and societal norms that prevent women from speaking out openly all contribute to the barriers that prevent women from holding political leadership positions. Female politicians are receiving more attention since they are crucial on both the national and international levels (Pittman, 2014).

Role of Civil Society:

As previously indicated, Pakistani society's sexism presents significant obstacles to women's socioeconomic emancipation. All of her major life decisions, including choosing a job and a spouse, are often made by the male family members in their appropriate roles. Women's NGOs, print and electronic media, and street theatres play a significant part in this since they not only bring attention to the problems associated with social and economic discrimination against women, but also provide solutions to these concerns. In one way or another, the topic of women's socioeconomic empowerment is a central theme in all of these media (Awan, 2012).

The majority of women's organisations only operate in a few posh areas of major urban centres, according to Dr. Tahmina Rashid, an expert on gender issues. However, in a few slum areas, significant grass-roots activity can also be seen, where lower class women are obviously struggling against great odds to make ends meet. Farzana Bari, a women's rights activist, also acknowledges the limited influence of women's NGOs. She provides a realistic perspective by expressing that activists strongly feel for women issues but they are not yet very active and effective. Additionally, Pakistani women's variety makes it difficult to create a unifying activist agenda and regional cultural differences make it challenging to include all viewpoints (Rashid, 2006). The first action taken to guarantee women's rights in Islam was the Muslim Family Law Ordinance (MFLO) in 1961. However, at the time the decree was approved, Pakistan did not have a functioning legislature since the military controlled all governmental institutions. Women's NGOs like UFWR and All Pakistan Women's Association

(APWA) backed the ordinance because it gave women for the first time in Pakistan's history some degree of protection by regulating issues like polygamy, marriage and divorce (Awan, 2012).

Women's Empowerment Obstacles:

Pakistani women face several obstacles on their path to empowerment. The first is a patriarchal mindset that is frequently mentioned and debated. It is well known that Pakistani society displays a patriarchal mentality, with the man dominating the female in a family structure. Women's chances are restricted by this special position, which also encourages discriminatory practises against them. According to the 1995, 1997 and 1998 Pakistan National Reports, repressive patriarchal institutions, inflexible orthodox standards and constrictive socio-cultural conventions and traditions are the main causes of gender discrimination and abuse against women. Additionally, discriminatory legislation and practises are growing the wage disparity between men and women in practically all-important industries, which has led to a rise in various types of violence against women. The conservative interpretation of Islam, which makes up 97 percent of Pakistan's population, is the second barrier. Even while the Quran and Sunnah recognise that women have an equal standing, the orthodoxy's strict interpretation of Islamic law-which is frequently made up of people who are only somewhat educated-has done much to limit the participation of women in socioeconomic and political activities. The third obstacle is discriminatory legislation and the unwillingness of executive entities to put into effect the laws already in place regarding women's problems. Since independence, several ordinances, legislative bills and constitutional amendments have been passed to grant women equal status, but these laws have only been implemented in text, not in spirit (ibid).

Conclusion:

In recent years, Pakistani women have been more conscious of their equal socio-economic and political rights thanks in large part to the role played by civil society, notably the media, women's organisations and women's political party wings. Although this awareness has created new opportunities for empowerment, a significant portion of women from all three socioeconomic groups continue to experience severe kinds of discrimination in all spheres of life. This gender gap starts at home, when the married

couple and their family members favour a male over a daughter during the first pregnancy. According to the criteria for 'empowering growth', this is correlated with a rise in women's access to secure work, with overall and sectoral GDP growth, and with related patterns of employment for both men and women. Although Pakistan's 4.5% average annual growth rate from 1990 to 2017 sounds remarkable, the performance has been somewhat unpredictable.

The concept of women's empowerment in Pakistan has become a fantasy since state-level efforts to bring about change have not been particularly successful. The government is attempting to give women more influence, but there are still many complicated obstacles to overcome. Attempts to advance women's status and rights are hampered by the temporary and non-authoritative nature of their position in the public realm. Even if a small number of women have held the top positions in several professions, many have been unable to achieve at the same level because of intangible barriers, losing their basis for societal discrimination.

Although Pakistan has made efforts to secure women's empowerment, many women still don't feel capable of making responsible decisions since they haven't participated in these formal advancements. Many women are content to live terrible lives as long as they can. Some claim that the fact that they have entered public and political life suffices to demonstrate their empowerment. In the end, relatively few people comprehend the significance of women's empowerment, a mentality that critically depends on societal transformation.

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