

GENDER INEQUALITY: PROBLEMS & ITS SOLUTIONS IN PAKISTAN

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Abstract

Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah said: “No Nation can rise to the heights of glory until your women are side by side with you” This research paper highlights the practices of gender discrimination and identifies the problems and its solutions in Pakistan, it covers the role played by women in Pakistan’s society and the factors of contribution by women, the research explains many shocking crimes committed against them, obsolete and unjust rituals, worse socio-economic conditions, religious learning and unlawful practices .Women in many countries are denied their equal share of work and rights. Especially in Pakistan where most of the women are under male dominant society where they are not able to take any decisions apart from few in urban areas and men justify their dominance over women. In the end it proposes a clear conclusion to provide equal status to women and making them suitably, equally powerful and strong in the society by empowering them and a drive against the domestic violence and gender discrimination. Even the Prophet P.B.U.H said: “Gaining of knowledge is obligatory on all Muslims (both men and women) without any discrimination. Finally remember a female is a grandmother, mother, sister, wife, a friend and above all a ‘Human being’

Key words: *Inequality, Empowerment, Gender Discrimination, Honor Killing, Pay Gap, Society, Muslims, Community, Behavior and Development.*

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Introduction

Gender inequality refers to unequal action or insights of persons based on their gender. It arises from dissimilarities in socially made gender roles as well as biologically through genes, brain structure, and hormonal unlikeness.

Equality is a human right. The female genders are entitled to live with respect and freedom from need and fear. The precondition for advancing development is by Gender equality, which leads to poverty reduction. When women are empowered they contribute to areas such as health, services, and commercial and as well as societal roles. A better and an empowered women may lead to a better generation in the upcoming years. After portraying all the problems faced by todays women and awareness the equality of women still remains a dream unfulfilled.

UNFPA has encouraged for women and girls, endorsing lawful and policy reforms and gender-sensitive data collection, and assisting creativities that progresses better women's health and enlarge their selections in life. (<http://www.unfpa.org/gender-equality>)

Women's Empowerment

Participation of women in economic activities across all sectors is essential to build stronger prospects of building a better economy, communicating across the globe to achieve international goals for better development and sustainability. The said prospect will lead to better quality of life not only for women but for the men as well. Private sector is playing a key role in advancing gender equality and empowering women. Gender diversity generates self and common interest for performing businesses Empowering women will allow them to involve in practical guidance to business and the principles will lead them to learn work at marketplace, community and to the world.

Some of the principles for empowering women were developed through a partnership between UN Women and United Nations global compact, which was designed to support corporations in reviewing the current and future policies and practices.

In Brief, the Principles Are

1. Launch high-level commercial leadership for gender parity.
2. Fair work policy for equal treatment—respect and support human rights and non-discrimination.

3. To make sure that health and safety procedures are applied for both men and women.
4. Education, training and professional development for women is promoted.
5. Equality by means of advocating and community services.
6. Public opinion and feedback in the form of reports to achieve, gender equality.

The principles were subtitled as Equality Means Business, it emphasized on the business case for the corporate industry to work on promoting gender equality and to empower women, it was also launched to inform them about the real life business practices and the information gathered across the world. These principles were introduced on the International Women's Day 2010, they were adopted by the Calvert Women's Principles® initially they were developed by UN Women in 2004, the first global corporate code of conduct focused on advancing, empowering and investing in women worldwide.

(<http://www.unwomen.org/en/partnerships/businesses-and-foundations/womens-empowerment-principles>)

National Assembly

There are a total of 342 members in the National Assembly of Pakistan, which includes 60 seats reserved for women and 10 for non-Muslims, as given in the article 51. The seats are allocated on the basis of population in each province, the federally administered areas (FATA) and the Federal capital. The number of current seats province and territory wise are as under:

	Punjab	Sindh	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	Balochistan	FATA	Federal Capital	Total
General	148	61	35	14	12	2	272
Women	35	14	8	3	0	0	60
Non-Muslims	--	--	--	--	--	--	10
Total	183	75	43	17	12	2	342

Source: <http://www.na.gov.pk/en/composition.php> (Official website of the National Assembly of Pakistan)

Women can also contest in the general seats in the National Assembly but unfortunately majority of the male candidates contest on general seats, leaving less options and chances for women candidates to take part and be elected on the general seats, in this regard the reserved seats for women should be increased as 60 reserved seats are insufficient where half of the country's population is female gender.

Population - Female (% of Total) in Pakistan

The female % of total population in Pakistan was last measured at 48.63 in 2010, as given by the World Bank. The model gives a clear view of how the female population in Pakistan has significantly rose to parity with the population of men in Pakistan from 1971 to 2010

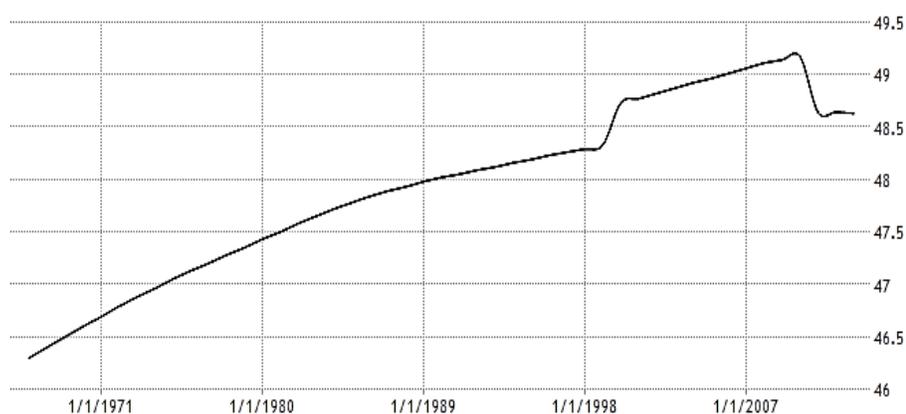


Chart showing the increase of women population from 1971-2010

World Bank Indicators - Pakistan – Population

	1990	2000	2010
Birth rate; crude (per 1,000 people) in Pakistan	40.4	31.4	27.3
Death rate; crude (per 1,000 people) in Pakistan	10.5	8.4	7.5

Population ages 0-14 (% of total) in Pakistan	43.4	41.4	35.4
Population ages 15-64 (% of total) in Pakistan	52.9	54.7	60.3
Population ages 65 and above (% of total) in Pakistan	3.7	3.9	4.3
Age dependency ratio (% of working-age population) in Pakistan	89.2	82.8	65.8
Age dependency ratio; old (% of working-age population) in Pakistan	7.0	7.2	7.1
Age dependency ratio; young (% of working-age population) in Pakistan	82.1	75.6	58.6
Population growth (annual %) in Pakistan	2.5	2.3	1.8
Population; total in Pakistan	107975060.2	144522192.0	173593383.0

Source: <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/pakistan/population-female-percent-of-total-wb-data.html>

The above model shows a significant rise in women population in Pakistan and the indicators by World Bank showing the average age and annual growth of population which is very alarming to be recognised for taking proper steps for women equality or else it will create dangerous situation within families of women being denied opportunities and a better life.

Umar Ibn Khattab R.A said: “The women are not a garment you wear and undress however you like, they are honoured and have their rights” (JWT: August 2015 p 89)

Contrary to the developed countries, where women are hand in glove with men in every walk of life irrespective of any so-called gender bias, the plight of the womenfolk in the developing and the underdeveloped countries is desperate. The conditions of women in these countries are no better than those of the women of the stone and the dark ages. Regrettably, our own country, Pakistan, is also no exception to it as a woman, which constitute almost 50 percent of the total population of the country, are living a life of miseries and wretchedness and they are underprivileged and deprived of their fundamental rights. (JWT: August 2015 p 88)

One women named Andrea says: “I would never call myself a feminist because that word has so many negative connotations. I don’t hate men or anything, I am not interested in protesting. I don’t want to go around with hacked-off hair and no makeup and sit around bashing men (Julia: 2005: p3)

Social and Economic Securities for Women in Islam

“Witness your duty to Allah in respect to the women, and treat them well”
(Al-hadith)

Islam has conferred on women the many social and economic safeties. Since its emergence, Islam always had promoted and protected the rights of the women. Islamic teachings, obliterating the false customs regarding women, have granted them extraordinary status and reputation. The cruel practices like female infanticide and burying daughters alive are totally barbaric and un-Islamic. This fair religion has adored the valued status of women in society. (JWT: April 2014 p 88)

Islam has also given women the right to have independent businesses, to trade, to give in charity, in cases of necessity or when a collective advantage can be gained, like nursing and treating female patients, midwifery, educating young women and other activities and social services involving women. The competent woman is encouraged to go out and meet the needs of her community, but only under the following conditions: (Naseef: 1999)

1. Her work must not consume her entire energy, thus preventing her from fulfilling her more important role as a wife and mother.
2. Her career must not conflict with or eliminate her from her distinct natural functions.

3. She should exercise her profession with dignity and modesty, avoiding temptations and situations which might arouse suspicion and distrust.
4. She should avoid mixing with men and being alone with one of them since the Prophet (S) said: “ No man should be alone with a woman except when there is a mahram with her”

In Pakistan laws and regulations supposedly based on Islamic teachings are bound to come with such provisions. Despite the fact that Pakistan is an Islamic republic and it boasts to have laws and regulations pursuant to Islam, the prevalent system of law and justice has proved to be just inept and inefficient to provide such secure environment to women as endorsed by the Islamic teachings. (JWT: April 2014, p90)

Article 25 of the 1973 Constitution of Pakistan says:

25. Equality of citizens:

- a) All citizens are equal before the law and are entitled to equal protection before law.
- b) There shall be no discrimination on the basis of sex alone
- c) Nothing in this article shall prevent the state from making any special provision for the protection of women and children

Article 34 further provides follows:

34. Steps shall be taken to ensure the full participation of women in all spheres of national life
(Zafar: 1991: p34)

Inhumane Customs, Traditions and Acts

1. Honor Killing (It is the homicide of a member of a family who is believed to have brought shame or dishonour upon the family)
2. Vani (A cultural custom in which a girl is forcibly married to a person who has attempted shameful act on her and accepts him to be his lawful husband)
3. Sati (Indian funeral custom, where a widow immolated herself on husband pyre)
4. Swara (A child marriage custom in tribal areas with different clans to resolve feuds)
5. Karo Kari (A way to restore the reputation and honour of the family)
6. Dowry Killings

7. Burying Daughters
8. Forced Marriages
9. Marriages with Quran
10. Acid throwing
11. Obsolete orthodox rituals.
12. Physical abuse of domestic workers

The Gender Pay Gap

Women are disproportionately found in low paying occupations and in lower status jobs in more highly paid occupations it comes as no surprise that most women earn less than most men. The gender pay gap, that is the ratio of female to male earnings expressed as a percentage of male earnings, is 16 per cent, on average, in OECD (Organization for Economic co-operation and Development) countries. (Richardson: 2008)

Role of Women in Pakistan Movement

Women are as important as men in the society, especially in Muslim society, the sub-continent was not any different to it. Any fair research and investigation on the teachings and message of Islam will surely depict a clear evidence of women's equality with man. Rights, regardless any women are entitled to have same importance as of men in this so complex world today. Right to election, political offices, participation in public affairs, The Holy scriptures are full of the right which are given to women and the obligations as mentioned in Surah Al-Nisah. (JWT: August 2015 p 72)

Kulsoon Rehman a female activist during Pakistan movement said: Our father told us that our countrymen needed our help, so my sister and I moved to the Walton refugee camp and learnt how to treat the injured.

Shaukat Ara an active member of the Muslim league said: "The surprise on Quaid-e-Azam's face was a sight to behold as we marched alongside him, swords in our hands and escorted him to the stage. (ibid p73)

Pakistan' Perspective

Gender discrimination has reached to an alarming situation and is a widely practiced issue in Pakistan. Different government and NGO's (Non-Governmental Organisation) are working on it. We must know that gender based jobs are

assigned by society not by nature, those roles are socially constructed where men and women are given equal share and opportunity.

Gender discrimination comes into play when it is believed that some irregular jobs are 'do-able' by men but cannot be done by women, also it is because of the religious misinterpretation that allows men to work and women to look after family and do household work, of which many men take advantage of being conservative of not let their women work. The point to understand is today there are two types of roles assigned in professional careers, soft jobs and hard role jobs and that is where it separates men with women. Many women in Pakistan are not allowed to work or choose their professional life because they are asked to get married and then they remain at the mercy of their husbands to allow them or not. This is itself a respect to the freedom of women to work and provide them equal opportunity to share the same values and importance.

But the blame should not only go to men alone, as women are also part of the discrimination, those who keep bearing the atrocities and abuses at work place and not to rise against it are also party to it. Especially in Pakistan where there is huge unemployment and there is no such state owned employment exchange, both men and women feel insecure to lose their jobs, as a result the discrimination on both ends is not raised to the authorities. Social restriction is also a problem to gender discrimination as it limits the approach of women development, many talents and qualified women are wasted and the society does not get benefit from it. It has also been observed that the intellect brains leave abroad for a better opportunity and life, leaving Pakistan again in search of better and qualified women. Awareness and importance of education is neglected so the enrolment ratio and the percentage of drop out from school to colleges and to universities increases. The need for ensuring the basic rights provided of education, mobility and freedom are the need of time.

Secondly, culture and customs also play an important role in gender discrimination. Different norms and traditions are also reasons to it, the women in Pakistan are assigned a few handful jobs in society and hence they are considered weak and emotional which leads to their stay at home to look after the affairs of the household. We also observe that women meet many difficulties in finding a place to work at public places, as many become victims of harassment or taunting. It has also been observed that mostly women are part of begging on streets which many in poor families find easy to earn and it becomes difficult to identify who is

needy and who is not but it does not mean that they should be left alone to be lived miserable life.

Many men believe in Pakistan that working of women may lead to the dishonour and will put shame on family and for them it is a matter of pride that women should stay at home and do household chores and look after kids.

As Rubina Saigol says: ‘Pakistan, as a nation-state, is a gendered entity, it is not simply a patriarchal and masculinist state; rather its rhetoric is bisexual in that the educational discourse reflects maternal as well as paternal aspects, values of nurturance as well as aggression and war. Educated women are seen as a threat since they challenge the dominance of patriarchal values in institutions, consequently, women in general are projected as guardian of domestic morals’ (Hussain: 1997: pg. 192)

Solutions to Gender Inequality

1. Provide equal Opportunity (Parity)
2. Promote education, training and professional development for women.
3. Fundamental Rights of the Gender.
4. Freedom to Movement.
5. Equal treatment of women with men at work.
6. Representation (Public and Private sector)
7. Women Empowerment.
8. Ensure Health, safety and well-being of all women and men.
9. Protection against domestic violence and abuses.
10. Legislation against Domestic violence and in the name of Honour killings.
11. Implement creative development, supply chain and marketing practices that empower women.

Conclusion

In Pakistan just like many Muslim countries, female suffer discrimination as a result of socio-cultural norms. The varied status of women across, classes, regions and the divide in rural and urban areas having influence of tribal, feudal and religious social formations on the lives of women have added miseries in their life which is a serious injustice to women.

Financial problems are a major concern for educating the women, while travelling many girls face harassment and criticism from the society. Females mostly from rural areas are unable to convince their families for education and higher

education, conveyance problems, lack of family support and the narrow mind-set of families make it worse for women. In some areas co-education and boarding facilities are preventing them from education. Marriage of daughters is the important preference than educating them. Private schools are not affordable and public schools are in a bad shape, further it makes life difficult for women to get education.

The problem is of male dominating society in Pakistan which leads to discrimination and yet women are not able to take decisions for their rights only a few in urban areas.

One of the adverse effects of gender inequality has resulted in the rise of prostitution and human trafficking, that has resulted in many incurable and spreading diseases such as HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis, It has been observed that the women who are in prostitution are not happy with their lives but unfortunately they blame the authorities and the community failing to provide them a chance to stand shoulder to shoulder with men.

All members of the community are requested to discourage the inhuman behaviour of extreme violence against women. The lawmakers are also requested to play important roles for the awareness and prevention of the violence and help in support for needed help aimed to promote gender equality in Pakistan.

Furthermore some steps for gender mainstreaming are to be taken too: understanding gender issues by policy makers, identifying main development problems, efforts towards achieving gender equality, policy intervention in achievement of goals and research on gender based issues. (JWT: February 2015: p 60) The dream of gender equality can be realized only if the women are brought in the national political mainstream, adequate as well as effectual representation, in all organs of the government. It will be only with the strong say or women in legislation that stringent legislation against domestic violence can be made. All skills, talents, expertise and energies of women need to be channelled in the right direction.

The Executives and Law makers are requested to ensure free and compulsory education, equal employment opportunities, proper maternity leaves, fair treatment, love, respect and harmony to women in Pakistan. The women in Pakistan have tremendous potential, from flying a fighter aircraft to become the

youngest Microsoft certified professional and in the shape of first Prime Minister of a Muslim country, it is just a matter of giving them the importance both in the society and in the professional field.

Most importantly the authorities must introduce the subject of ‘Gender Studies’ as a compulsory discipline at University level so an awareness and understanding between the two opposite genders will rise. It is only possible if together we can stand for human rights and humanity and bring peace and prosperity to our country, our Pakistan.

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