



Women in Pakistan between Marginalization and Societal Injustice

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Introduction

Women and girls represent half of the world's population, and therefore half of its potential, so gender equality besides being a fundamental human right, is essential to achieving peace in societies and unleashing society's full potential.

Unfortunately, there is still a long way to go to achieve full equality of rights and opportunities between men and women in Pakistan, as despite Pakistan being the fifth most populous country in the world, with a population of nearly 227 million, of which 49.2% are female, the problem of gender inequality is a major concern, as according to the Global Gender Gap Index 2022, out of 156 countries, Pakistan occupies Ranked 145th in terms of economic participation and opportunity, 135th in educational attainment, 143rd for health and survival, and 95th for political empowerment, moreover, Pakistan ranks 130th out of 139 countries, according to the Global Justice Project's Rule of Law Index.

According to the Women, Peace and Security Index, Pakistan ranks 167 out of 170 countries in terms of women's health and well-being, so it has been normal in recent years for Pakistani women to engage in protests against inequality and violence, demanding that the government take action to improve women's rights in Pakistan.

Governments of patriarchal societies such as Pakistan interpret the denial of women's rights as a result of respect for the cultural beliefs of their countries, and reject interference from other countries, byclaiming that human rights are a matter of state sovereignty, where patriarchal values inherent in local traditions and culture predetermine the social value of gender, and the role of women is limited to being mothers and wives, while the role of Men are productive, as breadwinners in the public arena, and this has led to a low level of investment of resources in women by the family and the state. Consequently, low investment in women's human capital.

Continuing the series of deprivations to which Pakistani women are subjected, there is also the ideology of the purdah, negative social prejudices, cultural practices regarding the concept of honour associated with women's lives, as well as restrictions on women's mobility and political representation, so that

women's own assimilation of patriarchy becomes the basis for gender discrimination and disparity in all spheres of life.

Through this report, we review several points related to the rights of Pakistani women, as follows:

- 1) Women's rights in international covenants
- 2) Social practices and Pakistani culture
- 3) Examples of crimes against Pakistani women
- 4) Education of Pakistani women
- 5) Pakistani women's right to work and the reasons behind their low participation rate
- 6) Pakistani women's health
- 7) Rural versus urban
- 8) Impact of climate change on Pakistani women
- 9) Empowering women in Pakistan
- 10) International calls for improving the status of women in Pakistan
- 11) Recommendations

Women's Rights in International Conventions

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights endorsed the principle of inadmissibility of discrimination, and declared that all human beings are born equal in dignity and rights, without any discrimination, including discrimination based on sex. This Declaration was followed by the International Covenants on Human Rights, affirmed the need to ensure the equality of men and women in the enjoyment of all economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights.

The Charter of the United Nations was not immune from this, as it affirmed the importance of basic human rights and dignity, the equal rights of men and women, and various other international instruments. Despite this, women are still subjected to widespread discrimination, which constitutes a flagrant violation of their internationally stipulated rights. It is also a major obstacle to their participation in political, social, economic and cultural life. Hence, it impedes the growth of the prosperity of society and the family, and increases the difficulty of fully developing the potential of women in the service of their country and humanity.

We cannot overlook the principles contained in the **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women**, which the Pakistani Government has pledged to fulfil. The most prominent of these principles are:

- **Article 1:** the term "discrimination against women" shall mean any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.
- **Article 2:** States undertake to:
 - (a) To embody the principle of the equality of men and women in their national constitutions or other appropriate legislation if not yet incorporated therein and to ensure, through law and other appropriate means, the practical realization of this principle;
 - (b) To adopt appropriate legislative and other measures, including sanctions where appropriate, prohibiting all discrimination against women;
 - (c) To establish legal protection of the rights of women on an equal basis with men and to ensure through competent national tribunals and other public institutions the effective protection of women against any act of discrimination;
 - (d) To refrain from engaging in any act or practice of discrimination against women and to ensure that public authorities and institutions shall act in conformity with this obligation;
 - (e) To take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women by any person, organization or enterprise;
 - (f) To take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to modify or abolish existing laws, regulations, customs and practices which constitute discrimination against women.
- **Article 4:** 1. Adoption by States Parties of temporary special measures aimed at accelerating de facto equality between men and women shall not be considered discrimination as defined in the present Convention.

- **Article 5:** States Parties shall take all appropriate measures: (a) To modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women.
- **Article 7:** States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular, shall ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right: (a) To vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies;
(b) To participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government;
(c) To participate in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country.
- **Article 10:** States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in order to ensure to them equal rights with men in the field of education.
- **Article 12:** 1. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of health care in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, access to health care services, including those related to family planning.
- **Article 13:** States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in other areas of economic and social life in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, the same rights.
- **Article 14:** 2. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in rural areas in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, that they participate in and benefit from rural development.
- **Article 16:** 1. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in all matters relating to marriage and family relations and in particular shall ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women: (a) The same right to enter into marriage;

- (b) The same right freely to choose a spouse and to enter into marriage only with their free and full consent;
- (c) The same rights and responsibilities during marriage and at its dissolution

Social Practices and Pakistani Culture

1. Purdah

Purdah, meaning curtain, is the most common word to describe the system of seclusion of women and the imposition of sovereignty. They are standards set for women in South Asia, particularly Pakistan and India.

The burqa is a large, wide and loose cloak that covers the woman from the top of her head to the soles of her feet so that nothing appears from her at all. At the face, there are very small holes such as (mosquito net) that are in front of the eye so that she can see the road as she walks. The majority of women wear this burqa in Pakistan until today, when they go out of the house to the market, to the doctor or to the hospital, because the traditions of women in Pakistan do not allow them to go out except for a very important matter that cannot be done while they are at home.

The wearing of the burqa begins at an early age. As soon as the girl reaches the age of thirteen, her family obliges her to wear the burqa. If she wears it, she usually does not take it off until after her death. Despite this, there are women whose purdah still prevents them from going out or appearing, while other girls and women do everything that Western women do.

The rules of purdah are followed in many communities in Pakistan and practiced in different ways depending on family tradition, region, caste and place of residence whether rural or urban.

2. Marriage of underage girls in Pakistan

3.3% of girls are married under the age of 15, while 18.3% of married girls are under the age of 18, which is much higher than that of boys under the age of 18, which is estimated at about 4.7% of boys across the country who are married under the age of 18. Child marriage is significantly higher in the tribal areas, where there are around 35% of all child marriages in the country.

Despite Pakistan's ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990, and its commitment to protecting the rights of children, as well as the

elimination of child marriage, as well as the enactment of the Child Marriage Prevention Act, which criminalizes marriage for girls under the age of 16, but underage marriage is still a problem in parts Several people from Pakistan, especially in rural areas, and this marriage is spread in order to resolve differences between tribes and different families, or because of the poverty that the family suffers from, which prompted Pakistani activists to demand raising the minimum age of marriage from 16 years to 18 years in all parts of the country, except The southern province of Sindh, where the age of marriage is 18 years.

The most prominent example of this is the recent marriage between Jamaat-ul-Islam MP Maulana Salahuddin Ayubi, 64, and an underage girl of 14 in Pakistan, which sparked outrage across the country and prompted human rights activists to urge the government to Take stronger action against child marriage.

3. Shegar/ Swap Marriage:

It is a tribal custom in which brides are bargained between two tribes in order to marry the son, but he must also have a daughter to marry in return, and if there is no daughter to exchange in return, the cousin or a relative can also do that. Although Islamic law requires the consent of both partners to marry, women in Pakistan are often forced into arranged marriages by their fathers or tribal leaders. Shagar is the most common marriage in the rural areas of northwestern and western Pakistan and is known as 'wata-satta'

4. Dowry:

The custom of dowry is practiced in Pakistan as also in other parts of South Asia, the giving of dowry is called Jahez, it is part of the culture and in more than 95% of marriages in every region of Pakistan it involves the transfer of dowry from the bride's family to the groom's family. Dowry-related disputes often lead to violence that may lead to murder. There are more than 2,000 dowry-related deaths annually. Annual women's death rates exceed 2.45 deaths per 100,000 women due to dowry-related violence. Pakistan has the highest number of deaths due to dowries.

Therefore, the dowry is considered a major cause of violent crimes against women, which include torture, domestic violence (such as physical, emotional or sexual abuse), psychological abuse, which may push the bride to commit suicide, and in some cases even murder.

5. Marriage to the Qur'an

Pakistan is known to have many deviations in thinking and opinions based on flimsy references towards women. Pakistani women are exposed to forms of violence, especially with regard to the issue of marriage.

Perhaps the most prominent and strangest type of marriage in Pakistan is the marriage of a girl to the Qur'an. This tradition exceeds the limits of reason and logic, flouting them. The father comes to his daughter, puts the Qur'an in her hands, and tells her that she is now married to this book, and asks her to swear that she will not think about marrying someone else. The girl is forced to agree for fear that she will be exposed to any form of violence that may take her life. Based on this marriage, the girl never leaves the house. Even if women come to the house, the girl is not allowed to go out to meet them. The girl's role is to arrange and take care of the house only.

The main goal of marrying a girl with the Qur'an is to bring money, as the members of her male tribe know that once a girl is married to the Qur'an, they should give her shares of land and property. Thus, many families resort to declaring that their daughter is married to the Qur'an. These cases are estimated in thousands in Sindh province. However, it is difficult for the authorities to know the victims of this marriage. It is worth noting that this marriage is not legally recognized as it is contrary to Islamic law.

6. Honor killings

It is the killing of a person suspected of having an unlawful love affair, and this act is known in Sindh and Balochistan as "Karo-Kari", but it is dealt with differently in Pakistan. Many cases of honor killings are reported against women who marry against the wishes of their families or who are seeking a divorce or have been raped.

Therefore, the vast majority of the victims of these crimes are women, but the penalties imposed on the killers are very lenient, which prompted the government to pass a law that equates Karo-Kari criminals with murderers. They also closed the loopholes that allowed perpetrators of honor crimes to avoid punishment through forgiveness from a family member, as well as the recent issuance of fatwas by the Pakistan Ulama Council denouncing honor killings. This came after religious bodies took a misogynist stance on the matter, by not allowing rape victims to use DNA evidence.

Examples of Crimes Against Pakistani Women

- 1) In 2016, the girl, Khadija, was stabbed 23 times, by a friend after their separation, on a street full of pedestrians in the city of Lahore. Her attacker

was sentenced to seven years, but the sentence was then reduced to only two years. In 2018, the Lahore Court of Appeal acquitted the attacker, basing its ruling on the fact that the victim's statements alone cannot be relied upon. The Supreme Court restarted the trial proceedings again, and the attacker was released on July 17, just three days before Noor Mukadam's murder.

- 2) On July 20, 2018, the 27-year-old girl Noor Mukadam was raped and murdered by a member of a wealthy circle friends to which she belonged. According to police investigations, Noor had been held hostage for two days by a person she knew, named Zahir Jaffer, a descendant of a wealthy family in Pakistan. Noor tried to flee and escape at least twice. In the footage, Noor is seen trying to jump out of a first-floor window, but she was dragged back into the house, where she was tortured, raped and killed, before being beheaded, due to Noor's refusal to marry Zahir, prompting human rights activists to call for Noor's legal right and for reform of Pakistan's criminal justice system.
- 3) In 2019, at least four journalists and bloggers were killed for their reporting, including journalist Arooj Iqbal, a woman shot dead in Lahore while seeking to launch her local newspaper. On 5 September 2020, journalist Shaheena Shaheen was shot dead by unknown assailants in Kish, Balochistan province.
- 4) On December 8, 2021, Pakistani police arrested five men who publicly stripped four women and photographed them, in an incident that occurred in the Faisalabad district of Punjab province, the country's industrial hub.
- 5) In February 2022, the brother of a star on social networks nicknamed "Kim Kardashian of Pakistan" who had been sentenced to life imprisonment since 2019 was released, days after he was acquitted of killing her in an "honor" crime in 2016, his lawyer announced.
- 6) On March 10, 2022, authorities in Pakistan arrested a father on suspicion of shooting dead his seven-day-old daughter, because he wanted his first child to be a boy. According to police investigations, the newborn baby named Jannat was shot five times inside her home in the central city of Mianwali. The suspected father is named Shahzib Khan.
- 7) On December 28, 2022, a lower ranking court in the Buner district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province released a rapist who married his victim, under a settlement made by a council of elders in the northwest of the country. 25-year-old rapist Daulat Khan was sentenced to life imprisonment in May for raping a deaf woman.
- 8) Pakistani forces arrested a brother who killed his sister because she defied his will by participating in a local ballot even though he prevented her from

doing so. According to police investigations, the incident occurred in the city of Taxila, 25 kilometers west of Islamabad. Brother Danish Ali, 20 years old, was angry with his sister Asifa Noreen, 32 years old, and works as a teacher, because she did not follow his instructions and insisted on voting. This prompted him to shoot Noreen with his pistol, killing her immediately in the family home.

- 9) A pregnant wife was killed by her angry family because she got married without their consent. Witnesses and the police said that Farzana Iqbal (25 years old) was killed by a number of attackers, including her father, because she loved Muhammad Iqbal instead of her cousin, who was chosen by the family to marry her.

Education of Pakistani Women

There is an African proverb that says, "If you educate a man, you educate the individual, but if you educate a woman, you teach a nation". However, Pakistan lacks awareness of how important girls' education is, both for the family and the country as a whole. It still falls short in combating discrimination against women, especially in the field of education, as there are about 13 million girls out of school.

Pakistan ranks second in illiteracy rate in South Asia after Afghanistan, and 150th out of 188 countries around the world. The literacy rate among Pakistani males is 68%, compared to 45% for females. Similarly, there is a significant gap between urban and rural areas in terms of literacy rates, with literacy rates of 74% and 46%, respectively. Moreover, Afghanistan and Pakistan are the only countries in the region where this disparity persists among younger generations.

Pakistan has a problem of equality in education, most notably in terms of gender. This is not surprising given that 22.5 million children in Pakistan are out of school, girls being the majority. According to recent figures, the situation seems to have improved – especially in urban areas where there is more gender equality between boys and girls. However, school enrollment does not automatically translate into performance. For example, only 38% of girls compared to 46% of boys can read at least 3 basic sentences in Urdu or a local language. Similarly, only 36% of girls compared to 43% of boys can complete a subtraction problem of at least one digit. The metrics for accessibility and literacy or basic arithmetic only scratch the surface of a much deeper problem.

Pakistan faces some challenges that hinder girls' access to education, including:

1. The existence of some prevailing cultural barriers that discourage girls from seeking education, and that women play a reproductive role within the confines of the home to the belief that women's education is worthless.
2. Early marriage. After marriage, Pakistani women are under severe societal pressure that prevents them from continuing their education. 21% of girls marry at age 18, while 3% marry by their fifteenth birthday. A girl's chances of becoming a child bride decrease by 3.4% for each year she completes from her secondary education. Government officials are currently raising the legal age of marriage to 18 in an effort to protect these girls.
3. The suffering of some rural and urban areas from extreme poverty, scarcity of teachers, as well as the absence of quality education, which increases the suffering of girls living in these areas, for example: there are approximately 150,000 girls out of school in the Lahore region, and women in Balochistan are forced to have children for their husbands and stay inside their homes, therefore, the female literacy rate is 15 and 25%.
4. In developing regions, girls' schools are far from home, many families cannot afford their children's travel, and girls live in fear due to extremist politics: armed groups in KPK have bombed thousands of schools because they are against women's education, and several governments and the girls' private school have threatened to stop girls' education.
5. Many schools have only primary education, so education is limited to this level because girls are unable to travel long distances to attend secondary school.
6. Career challenges for women, this is also another problem studied for female education in Pakistan. After completing a diploma or degree, the student progresses in his/her career. At this stage, girls also have to face problems. There are fewer job opportunities, lower salaries, fewer jobs and other challenges. Such situations are sure to discourage girls from traveling to their destinations.

Pakistani Women's Right to Work

Pakistan's female labor force participation rate is 20%, one of the lowest in South Asia and globally. Low levels of education, mobility challenges, and gender norms limit women's entry and retention in the formal workforce. A large proportion of female workers are represented in the informal sector as domestic workers.

There are 4.4 million working women and children in Pakistan, of whom 3.6 million perform paid work from home or elsewhere of their choice, mainly as freelancers involved in production and manufacturing chains to make products such as textiles and leather goods or livestock for agriculture and binary products. Due to gaps in the available data, the estimates are likely to underrepresent the true volume of working from home.

In addition, only 10% of non-agricultural workers in the private formal sector are women. Women's participation in the labor force is declining. It fell from 24% in 2016 to 22% in 2021 and is well below the rates of countries with similar income levels. In comparison, the labor force participation rate for men is 83%, indicating one of the highest gender gaps in the labor force participation rate. Even among women with a high level of education, labor force participation is low, with only 25% of Pakistani women having a university degree.

Low female labor force participation leads to potentially significant loss of productivity. The decline in Pakistani women's participation in the labor force is the opposite of current global trends. The average global gap between male and female labor force participation rates is declining as countries try to empower women by employing better wages and ensuring their contribution to economic growth and prosperity.

Reasons for the low labor force participation rate.

–Normative barriers: marriage, mobility, safety and attitudes

There is an inverse relationship between marriage and women's participation in the labor force even after the influence of other relevant factors such as education or residence in urban, rural and provincial areas. Perhaps because of the pressure to support a growing family, marriage may bring restrictions such as increased responsibilities for childcare and household chores, as well as increasing restrictions on mobility and the ability to make independent decisions.

-Restrictions on movement

Mobility restriction is also linked to women's ability to participate in the workforce. According to the 2019 Work Skills Survey, only 30% of women can go to local markets or local health facilities alone, while 13% said they have never been to local health facilities. This lack of mobility limits women's flexibility in traveling to work and doing business, affecting their participation in the workforce.

Women who are able to go to local markets alone or accompanied by women are therefore more likely to join the workforce. According to FLFP 2018, 17% of women who can travel to local markets on their own are from the workforce compared to 9% of women who report that they can never go to market.

-Safety concerns

The concept of safety is closely related to mobility when one is outside. This perception seems to matter when it comes to labor force participation. 17% of women who feel safe walking alone outside of their communities or neighborhoods are more likely to work than 11% who do not feel safe. Both safety concerns and lack of mobility explain why women in Pakistan prefer to work from home.

While educated women struggled to enter and remain in the workforce, women with lower levels of education faced more restrictions. This has indicated gaps in their aspirations and a lack of knowledge of opportunities. Many women have been forced to drop out of school due to safety concerns or financial constraints, while others fear resistance from family and communities.

-Family restrictions

83% of women who do not work outside their homes cite housework as the main reason for not working. A combination of housework and childcare responsibilities hampers women's ability to work outside the home, even in urban areas. While if women are given flexibility in terms of working hours, working from home limits the type of jobs women can take, negatively affecting their advancement and income.

Attitudes towards women's work outside the home and communication

Attitudes towards women working outside the home seem to be rather favorable. Urban women are more supportive of working women than rural women. Another key factor is the importance of networks and support groups for women that can help them find mentors and better job opportunities.

-Workplace harassment

Sexual harassment in the workplace is prevalent in Pakistan. In Karachi, which is generally believed to be the city with the most social norms suitable for women's work, 96% of respondents in a survey of 10 private institutions and 10 public institutions stated that they or their colleagues had experienced sexual harassment in the workplace, thus existing job opportunities could be made more acceptable to women in Pakistan by improving the workplace environment.

The Protection against Harassment of Women in the Workplace (Amendment) Act 2022, drafted by the Federal Ministry of Human Rights (MoHR), aims to ensure and facilitate increased participation of women in the workforce; however, only 10% of people are aware of the laws and only 2% of organizations have implemented this policy.

-Lack of education and skills

In Pakistan, the low literacy rate, especially for girls, is worrying. According to the census, where the current female literacy rate is 36%, it doubles the high school dropout rate. Surprisingly, starting with 33% of elementary school enrollment, enrollment is only 6.59% at the high school level, falling to 1.2% at the college degree level. This reduces the chances of women emerging in leadership positions in the political structure as well as entrepreneurship and senior executives.

Pakistani Women's Health

The level of women's health in Pakistan is among the lowest in the world and compares negatively to the level of women's health in neighboring South Asian countries. In Pakistan, one in 38 women dies from pregnancy-related causes. These figures reflect a pervasive form of gender-based violence that works not through work but through neglect of women's healthcare needs.

Pakistan is a male-dominated society where very few females enjoy basic human rights, the exercise of basic access and rights to opportunity. This is even more true in the health sector, where women's health problems usually go unnoticed. Moreover, there is a shortage of female doctors in small towns and villages, which is the height of ignorance of women's health issues in Pakistan.

Thus, women of reproductive age (15-49 years) in both urban and rural areas face multiple barriers in accessing their reproductive rights due to lack of awareness, lack of health-care facilities or even because of the social and cultural stigma that defines women's boundaries.

As a World Bank report noted, "High fertility and women's poor health not only seriously reduce family well-being and productive capacity in Pakistan, but also the development potential of tomorrow."

At the Asma Jahangir Conference session on "Population, Family Planning and Reproductive Rights", speakers called for prioritizing healthcare for Pakistani women. As Dr. Zeba Sathar, Director of the Population Council, pointed out, "Women are at the heart of family planning, and if women are not granted contraceptive rights, there is a lack of intention to provide these services and achieve goals."

However, women's health remains a crucial issue for the country, according to the World Health Organization. Women's health goes beyond just medical ailments. In many families, women do not receive adequate nutrition. Families are strongly reluctant to take female members of their families to a male doctor.

Rural Vs Urban

The amount of urban and rural women attending school varies drastically. As women's education rises daily, parents of girls living in urban areas are more receptive to enrolling their girls in school and even encouraging them to complete a career. They are more aware of their rights, which makes them more motivated to stand up for their learning. These urban people recognize the importance of education. Girls living in urban areas are often enrolled in private schools for better education, have many educational opportunities, are surrounded by educated people and no one prevents them from studying or

destroys them. Unlike rural women, who are frustrated with going to school. Most of whom are born into conservative families with little education. They have to work more than urban women, because they don't have support. If their parents accept education, they cannot go, as the majority are poor and cannot afford to pay expenses. They do not go to school in rural Pakistan because it is socially unacceptable. These more traditional families tend to expect women to stay at home even when men go to work. They are restricted in rural areas, possibly because there are no schools in their areas or they travel long distances to study.

The Impact of Climate Change on Pakistani Women

Women account for about 80% of those displaced by climate change, according to a United Nations report, making them more vulnerable to violence.

The cumulative and gendered consequences of climate change and environmental degradation violate all aspects of women's and girls' rights, as “emerging evidence shows that the negative impacts of climate change globally are exacerbating all types of gender-based violence against women and girls, from physical and psychological to economic violence, all while reducing the availability and effectiveness of protection mechanisms and further weakening capacities to prevent violence.”

Climate change has severely changed the features of the weather in South Asia. Pakistan is a clear example of these changes, as it has been suffering from floods in recent years, most recently in September 2022, which environmental and natural disaster organizations have described as the worst ever in the country.

Recent floods in Pakistan have killed more than 1,000 people and millions lost their homes. Authorities are looking to boost relief efforts to support the millions affected by the disaster.

For example, monsoon rains, the likes of which Pakistan has not seen in decades, caused flooding that swept through a third of the country this summer. In the small Pakistani village of Basti Ahmad Din, residents face the new reality of destruction of their homes and lives. Disease and starvation threaten the residents of the flooded village of Basti Ahmed, which can only

be reached by boat after heavy monsoon rains. However, they rejected pleas to evacuate them when disaster struck. Some residents explained that leaving their homes to take refuge in a camp for displaced people meant that village women would mingle with strange men, which would be considered an insult to their "honour." The village women had no say in the decision.

Many aid workers who came to help the village asked them to evacuate, but to no avail. Mohammad Amir, a resident of the village, said: "We are Baloch. Baloch don't let their women out," he said, referring to the majority ethnic group in the village. "Baloch would rather starve to death than let their families out."

When asked if she would prefer to stay safe in a camp on dry land, 17-year-old Shirin Bibi said: "The elders of the village make the decision."

In Pakistan's often deeply conservative rural areas, a patriarchal system based on the concept of "honour" controls women's lives. In desperate situations such as the current one caused by the floods, women can find themselves completely deprived of food or care.

The village's elders, all men, believe that it is not acceptable for women to go out except in "emergency" situations, i.e., when faced with a serious health problem, for example. Natural disasters are not considered a good cause. Murid Hussain, an elder, says no one was evacuated during major floods in 2010.

"We didn't leave the village at the time," he says, adding, "We won't let our women out. They cannot stay in those camps. It's a matter of honour."

Empowering Women in Pakistan

Social empowerment

Women's empowerment has always been a contested issue in the complex social, demographic and cultural milieu of Pakistani society. Women rank below men in all vital human development indicators. Therefore, there is an urgent need to examine the different determinants of women's empowerment in the Pakistani context.

Social change means changing the mechanisms within a social structure, which is characterized by changes in cultural symbols, codes of conduct, social organizations, or a value system. Simply put, it is the study of shifts in attitudes and behavior that characterize society. Without a doubt, society develops through evolutionary processes. Therefore, there is a clear change in the social and economic structures of society. These social changes are also the result of specific social movements, such as the civil rights movement, women's suffrage, and women's empowerment movements.

Cultural, religious, economic, scientific or technical elements can also influence this social transformation. Women's empowerment has long been a controversial topic in developing countries such as Pakistan due to the complex cultural, social and demographic environment. The overall key indicators of human development were considered to be lower for women than for men. Although Pakistan has taken some important steps towards women's empowerment, their situation remains deteriorating, particularly in rural areas.

Women's empowerment is a valuable tool in developing countries like Pakistan to lift millions of people out of poverty, reduce mortality rates, reduce dependency burdens, and promote long-term sustainable development in the world. Women's participation is critical to creating lasting change that benefits everyone, not just women themselves. Women and girls make up an unreasonably large proportion of poor countries, and are more likely to be exposed to hunger, violence, disasters and climate change. In addition, the majority of women in developing countries lack legal rights and basic necessities of life when compared to men.

Many recent studies conducted around the world show that women's empowerment is crucial for a nation to maintain sustainable economic progress. Women's empowerment is also a critical component of gender equality. The relationship between economic growth and women's empowerment is twofold and is defined as increasing women's access to health, education and employment opportunities as well as their rights and political participation in general; in order to reduce gender inequality, economic development can make a significant contribution.

Access to education, adequate employment opportunities, and media information approaches are more appropriate and feasible measures to adequately empower women and access health care. Government policy

measures should be implemented in emergency situations, such as providing women with access to education outside their homes, increasing the number of jobs that prioritize women, and ensuring that they have adequate access to the media to raise awareness of their legal rights and important social contributions.

Pakistan's inability to maintain gender equality and its failure to take into account the ideas and views of nearly half of the population prevent it from getting the opportunity it needs to promote economic progress. If women's labor force participation rate is equal to that of men, Pakistan's GDP is expected to increase by about a third, according to IMF research.

Significantly increasing the participation of women in economic activities will greatly assist in achieving the country's goal of comprehensive development and sustainable economic growth. South Punjab is seen as a backward region of Punjab where women are disadvantaged. In southern Punjab, women's empowerment is greatly diminished by patriarchal factors. Therefore, in such circumstances, education is one of the best solutions that would enable women to contribute to the socio-economic development of the region in a better way.

Time is needed to provide girls in southern Punjab with accessible educational opportunities, particularly in the higher education model. In such prevailing circumstances, the role of universities has become important because such institutions can provide special facilities for girls' education. The introduction of special scholarships, the availability of transportation and the allocation of special seats are steps to motivate female students to higher education.

Economic empowerment

Pakistan has not yet been able to benefit from its young population, especially its female population. Currently, approximately 44% of Pakistan's population is counted as low-income, with the Pakistani rupee depreciating 21.7% from the previous fiscal year and Pakistan's trade deficit reaching \$48.66 billion. This pushed the country to the brink of bankruptcy.

Although women make up 49% of the total population, the female participation rate is remarkably low at just 21% in the current workforce – with only 25% of women with a college degree. Since most income earners

are only responsible for middle-class families, the annual per capita income in Pakistan has declined over the years.

Improving this situation requires the active participation of women in various economic sectors. Rural women's participation in agriculture, for example, is often not paid and is considered part of domestic duties. Meanwhile, Pakistan has the lowest number of entrepreneurs in the world, and women own only 8% of MSMEs.

Women's empowerment and integration into the economy can be an untapped potential necessary to drive the growth and development necessary to revive a spectacular economy. Pakistan's GDP could rise by 60% by 2025 if the female workforce becomes equal to the male workforce. However, to improve women's access to the workforce in Pakistan, a deep knowledge of cultural and institutional constraints is important. Pakistan has the lowest level of gender parity compared to other South Asian countries.

The living standards of many Pakistani women, and lack of access to health and education especially in rural areas is a major obstacle to economic empowerment. This is especially true in the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), where only one in 10 girls can read, and 50% of girls have never been to school. In Balochistan – which has the lowest female literacy rate of 24% in all provinces of Pakistan – 67% of girls are out of school and women's participation in work is only 4.9%. In addition, the health sector in rural sectors, particularly the former FATA, reflects dire conditions: the proportion of women giving birth under medical care drops to about 26%. Lack of education, poor health, and absence from the formal economy ultimately leads to low levels of basic skills and financial independence.

Because of these structural and cultural challenges facing women, Pakistan ranks only 129 out of 165 countries in the 2021 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) ranking and has shown a particularly bad performance in the SDGs for gender equality, as the female unemployment rate has risen from 9 to 10%.

Patriarchy at the cultural and institutional level is also a major obstacle to women's empowerment in Pakistan. A female child is seen as a burden on the family from the day she is born and preference is given to the male child. Poor educational and health levels, restrictions on movement, early and forced

marriage, failure to divide household chores with male counterparts, unfavourable working conditions, discriminatory treatment, and unequal wages all discourage women from actively participating in Pakistan's economy.

One promising area for growth and innovation is the agricultural sector, which employs 65% of working women in Pakistan and contributes 18.9% to Pakistan's GDP. Modernization in agriculture can support introducing women to innovative technological practices as well as empowering women in the agricultural sector to invest in the green technology revolution and improve productivity through agribusinesses as agricultural extension agents.

International Calls for Improving the Status of Women in Pakistan

The Human Rights Council has expressed concern in Pakistan. The unequal status of women continues to lead to widespread denial of their rights, from the right to education to the right to make decisions about their lives, to excessive maternal mortality rates, widespread poverty, and high levels of violence and sexual violence against women and girls. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women found “persistent discriminatory stereotypes” and expressed concern about widespread child and forced marriage, as well as so-called “honour” killings. Women from minority religious communities are at greater risk of forced marriage accompanied by forced conversion. It urged Pakistan to support and protect women human rights defenders and journalists who are at the forefront of efforts to promote legal and societal change.

Perhaps the most prominent international initiatives towards women in Pakistan are:

Global organizations such as the United Nations are not ignoring the crisis of women's rights in Pakistan. In 2017, the UN released a three-year project titled "Economic Empowerment of Home-Based Workers and Excluded Groups in Pakistan". The purpose of the initiative was to allow women, domestic workers, to contribute effectively to and benefit from Pakistan's economy, and the private sector, the state, Pakistani women and the United Nations benefited from this initiative.

In 2020, the Pakistani government passed an anti-rape law that promised harsh penalties for those who commit sex crimes. This decree provides a higher degree of protection and security for women facing domestic violence.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Pakistani government has made small but essential improvements for victims of domestic violence including shelters, psychological support, and national helplines. In 2021, USAID helped the Pakistani government provide advisory services to 61,000 women survivors of domestic violence, improve the maternal health care system and train public defenders on how to protect women's rights in Pakistan under the law.

Conclusion

In Pakistan, there is a huge gap in the rights of men and women. This includes discriminatory laws, bad policies and programs, as well as inadequate budget allocations, harmful social and cultural practices. Disparities remain unchanged due to lack of political will, and the absence of meaningful and effective positive action.

There are different types of violence against women in Pakistan. Violence can take several forms including physical, mental or emotional abuse, which is common. Rape is still the most prevalent form of violence against women. Because of the stigma that surrounds the victim, only a small percentage of cases are reported or filed in court. Although there are many laws in Pakistan, all this is still happening. The government has completely failed in the protection and defense of women's rights.

Recommendations

- 1) Put literacy eradication on the top of the state's priorities, establishing a program that provides newly-literate citizens with continuous learning opportunities to achieve positive results.
- 2) Punish all those who practice violence against women in accordance with laws and legislation, and compensate women who have been subjected to violence for the damages they have suffered.

- 3) Pay attention to the education sector in order to modify social and cultural behaviours and get rid of wrong practices against women.
- 4) Focus on reducing aggression between students, with schools providing students with the arts of dealing and building relationships based on respect between the sexes.
- 5) Raise awareness among individuals about the dangers of customs and traditions that have harmful effects on women's lives, and about the poor conditions that women face in rural areas, as well as educating society about the realities of the widespread phenomenon of violence against women.
- 6) Educate the community about the negative aspects of early and forced marriage.
- 7) Cooperate with international organizations to support countries' efforts to eradicate this violence.
- 8) Empower women to prepare for disasters, providing alternative means of earning a living to face climate crises, and enacting deterrent penalties to enforce the respect and protection of women and girls.
- 9) Set a development plan where women's education and healthcare are the primary focus.
- 10) Present and introduce women-centred development strategies by state institutions and international aid organizations, advocating the economic empowerment of women at the local leadership level.
- 11) Educate parents about the benefits of education, conducting an educational campaign at the government level to encourage parents to think about educating their children, especially girls, because of the financial and social benefits that come to society.
- 12) Build more primary and secondary schools for girls, as the lack of them is one of the prominent problems of female education in Pakistan.
- 13) Promote moral values in society.
- 14) Ensure rich career opportunities for females.
- 15) Strengthen the health system to better meet the needs of Pakistani women.
- 16) Expand community family planning services, and train and support health service providers, especially in rural areas.
- 17) Encourage women's participation in the labour force through providing specific facilities they need, such as transportation by the employer, separate toilets for women, and childcare facilities.

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