

Pakistani Society and Changing Gender Roles: Issues and Prospects

1. Introduction:

Many societal norms and traditions have confined different genders to perform specific functions and posed challenges in changing gender roles in Pakistan; however, several ongoing initiatives are contributing in changing these roles.

2. Pakistani society and fixed gender roles.

3. Societal factors - barriers in changing gender roles.

- a) Cultural norms and misinterpretation of religion.
- b) Enrooted patriarchal structure in Pakistan.
- c) Lack of education and awareness
- d) Social stigma and discrimination

- e) Economic dependence of women on men.
- f) Legal and institutional barriers.
- g) Contribution of media in portraying gender roles.
- h) Violence against women to suppress their voices.
- 4) Several ongoing trends and initiatives provide hope for gender equality.
 - a) Initiatives for educational advancements
 - b) Steps to enhance economic empowerment of women.
 - c) Legislative reforms to promote greater gender equality.
 - d) Changing role of media and Technology
- 5) Conclusion

"One is not born, but rather becomes a woman" - Simone de Beauvoir. A person does not come to this world with the predetermined

roles, rather it is the society which contributes greatly in assigning the roles. Pakistani society has posed many challenges in reversing the gender roles. Many cultural conceptions are the biggest hurdles to go against societal expectations. Due to entrenched patriarchal structure in Pakistani society, many women are confined to perform specific functions. Moreover, many social stigmas and discriminations are attached to different genders. Several other factors, including lack of education and economic dependency on men, have bound women to do certain roles. Media has also played its part in specifying gender roles. However, there is a ray of hope that Pakistani society will come out of these banal conceptions as many initiatives have been taken to change

gender roles. Hence, many societal norms and traditions have played their part in assigning gender roles, but these trends can be encountered as Pakistan has taken many initiatives to provide gender equality.

Pakistani society has fixed gender roles, prescribing to each gender some specific attitudes, behaviors and moral codes. This discrimination in gender roles has a great impact on women to pursue their career or to avail opportunities. Unfortunately, these gender roles have favoured men, more than women. Women are at a losing side in every field of life - because of these assigned roles. In Pakistani society, men are called provider who earn money through employment.

On the other hand, women are provided homemaker who takes care of children and household.

Consequently, in every field, including employment, leadership, education, healthcare, men are dominant.

According to World Economic Forum's Global Gender report 2023, Pakistan has been ranked 112 out of 116

countries - with 57.5% gender parity gap. Hence, women are still bound to perform household duties which lessens their participation in every other field of life.

Cultural norms and misinterpretation of religion are responsible for performing gender specific roles. In Pakistani society, culture and religion play a great part in shaping perceptions about gender-specific roles. Many

false conceptions, including subversive nature of women or dominant position of men, have limited women to four walls. Moreover, cultural norms favour men's education and employment. On the other hand women are subjected to early marriages, early pregnancies and early household responsibilities. According to a survey, 18.3% of girls in Pakistan are married before their 18th birthday. Moreover, because of these gender roles, employed women have dual responsibilities— at workplace and at home.

According to a survey by Gallup Pakistan 2023, 33% of employed women experience burnout very often and always, while 25% of men say the same. Hence, these expected roles are the biggest

hindrance in changing gender roles

Patriarchal structure is enrooted in Pakistani society which is the greatest barrier in changing gender roles. In Pakistani society, men enjoy their dominance in every field of life. Women are experience discrimination, violence and subjugation, both at home and at workforce. Moreover, this patriarchal structure has given birth to many inequalities in society. Men enjoys their domination and subjugation of women. Henrik Ibsen has well-documented the patriarchal structure which directly hits women, in his play "Doll's House". At the end, his female protagonist has realized that she is just a pawn who plays at his husband's hand. Likewise, in Pakistani

society, women are considered weak, submissive and dependent on men which further impedes their progress in every sector of life. Hence, due to this patriarchal structure, women are forced to perform their gender-specific roles.

Lack of education and awareness are major contributors to persistent gender roles prevailing in a society. Infact, many societies are against women's education in fear that they will stand against these gender roles. This is more prevalent in rural areas where women have no access to education.

Research by Brookings Institution suggests that women's education is correlated with lower fertility rates and changes in cultural norms.

Moreover, according to a survey, 2 million more girls are out of school than boys. This lack of education has forced women to accept their assigned roles. 85% of Pakistanis agree that the women's role is to be a good mothers and wives. Hence, lack of education and awareness are barriers in changing gender roles.

In Pakistani society, many social stigmas and discriminations are attached to specific gender roles. These discriminations act as a hindrance in changing gender roles. Due to these discriminations, women are ^{rarely} performing in industries, hospitals and financial public sectors. Moreover many discriminations are attached to women's career, education and

employment opportunities. According to a report, women's employment in fields associated with science, technology, engineering and mathematics is only 29%, while in non-STEM sectors it is 50%. These discriminations in a society push women to perform their submissive roles in a and to accept career or educational opportunities which are assigned to them. Hence, social stigmas and discriminations prevail gender-associated roles.

Economic dependence of women on men has posed a challenge to change gender roles. Women are always dependent on men for financial stability, and hence in a weak position to stand against gender roles. Women get low wages and their

labor force participation is low than the participation of men. World Bank indicates that around 22% of women participate in labor force, whereas the participation of men is ^{82%} 85%. Moreover, the gender pay gap is 34% (International Labor Force Organization, Global Wage Gap Report, 2019). Hence, these disparities in economic sector have left women in their fragile position and to accept their roles in a society.

Legal and institutional barriers for women result in accepting male dominance and weaker positions for women. Many legal policies aim to challenge the gender roles, but their implementation is the main issue. Moreover, women are at a weaker position in occupying seats in politics or

in decision-making institutes. There are many hurdles for women to participate in decision-making process. These disparities prevent women in making laws for equal gender equality. Consequently, there are fewer laws which address low wages, employment, healthcare, education and family & welfare of laws. Hence, legal and institutional barriers for women have resulted in forced implementation of gender roles. &

Media has a significant contribution in portraying gender roles which has shaped the societal norms and traditions.

Media uses many platforms to depict that women are sacrificing, and a weaker segment of society.

On the other side, men are

aggressive, dominant and powerful segment of a society. Dramas, TV channels, films, advertisements are all showing the weaker side of women which only knows how to sacrifice and maintain beauty standards for men. For example, Erving Goffman in "Gender Advertisements" has portrayed how advertisements promote gender roles and perpetuate certain stereotypes. Hence, media uses different techniques to indirectly promote gender roles which are already prevalent in a society.

Women face violence, which suppresses their violence against existing gender roles. Women face violence in the form of murder, rape, honor killing, acid attacks and sexual harassment.

These practices in society keep women to stay in their limited boundaries. Moreover, many conservative religious scholars promote violence against women if they stand against their societal norms and expectations. Many female parliamentarians experience threats and harassments which impede their progress in making suitable laws for women. Every 1 in 3 women has suffered physical or sexual violence (World Health Organization, 2021). Moreover, these practices impact on their psychological health. Blackmailing, abusive language, taunts, bullying, divorce prevent women from taking any action against societal norms.

After looking the grim

side of the picture, there is a ray of hope that Pakistan will progress in prevailing gender equality. Many initiatives have been taken to fight against the societal norms and expectations.

There are many initiatives for educational advancement which are ensuring a women's educational opportunities. National Education Policy has taken many steps to enhance equal educational opportunities. Moreover, Benazir Bhutto Shaheed Youth Development Program and Girls Stipend Program are good initiatives to promote provide financial assistance and scholarships in order to ensure their attendance. Hence, by promoting educational opportunities, Pakistan will soon overcome the gender disparity rate.

Pakistan has taken several steps for economic empowerment of women - fighting against the societal norms. Many initiatives ensure equal wages, no discrimination in career choices and equal participation of women in decision-making process. For example, Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workforce Act, 2010 in Pakistan. It has minimized the security threats which usually women face when they go for any job. Moreover, many girls are studying engineering, medicine and aviation. Technology has also played its part to make women independent. Hence, empowerment of women will result in gender equality.

Many legislative reforms have been introduced to promote gender equality. These legislative reforms ensure equal opportunities of healthcare, education, employment, and political participation. These legislative reforms will improve their position in a society. For example, Election Act 2017 made it mandatory for political parties to give 5% tickets to female on general seats. It has improved their political participation. Moreover, many legal acts are securing women against violence, discrimination and harassment. These all trends and initiatives will automatically empower women for to fight for their legal rights and to stand against false societal norms.

Changing role of media

and Technology provide women much space to understand their position in a society. In recent era, media is portraying women's empowerment in sports, politics and drama industry. This glorification of women's empowerment has pushed many societies to give equal treatment based on gender.

Moreover, Technology has played a significant role in promoting equal gender perceptions. For example, Women Entrepreneurship Development in Lahore has enabled many women to acquire training, mentoring and providing financial resources. Hence, changing role of media and significant contribution of technology are posing threats to different gender

roles in a society.

In a nutshell, women are on a losing ground because of predetermined gender roles and expectations. These expectations for of modest behavior, attitude and living style make women more fragile and submissive.

As Shakespear wrote in Hamlet, "Frailty, thy name is woman." Specific gender roles are responsible for gender inequalities, patriarchal system and discriminations in a society. Moreover, society has played its part in associating gender roles by taking the help of media, religion and cultural norms. However, these gender roles can be reversed in future, and society will surrender by accepting gender equality. As Pakistan has taken many initiatives

M T W T F S

To ensure gender equality
in every field of life.