

Gender inequality and women's empowerment in Pakistan.

1 Outline:

2 Introduction:

Thesis Statement: Gender equality is a popular slogan yet far from being achieved in Pakistan. Women are lag behind men in almost every sphere of life. However, certain initiatives have been taken by government of Pakistan to ensure women empowerment.

3 An overview of gender inequality in Pakistan

4 Factors that are contributing in gender inequality in Pakistan:

- (a) Glass ceiling in different departments
- (b) Absence from politics
- (c) Gender pay gap
- (d) Sexual harassment at workplace
- (e) Media sexism
- (f) Societal taboos and wrong interpretation of religion
- (g) Malnutrition in females

5 (a) Initiatives that are taken by government to ensure women's empowerment in Pakistan:

- (a) Decent transportation for female workers i.e Pink Bus Service.
- (b) Sexual harassment laws
- (c) Increase number of quota in civil service of Pakistan i.e 10pc reserve seats for women
- (e) Government has initiated scholarship programmes for marginalized women.

(6) Measures that can be taken to ensure gender equality in Pakistan:

- (a) By ensuring women to take part in digital economy
- (b) By initiating different welfare programmes only for women.
- (c) By ensuring reasonable quota of women in policy making process.

(7) Conclusion:

"No nation can rise to the height of glory unless your women are side by side with you. We are victims of evil customs. It is a crime against humanity that our women are shut up within the four walls of the houses as prisoners. There is no sanction anywhere for the deplorable condition in which our women have to live." Decade ago, the founding father of Pakistan had said this about women's empowerment. But status of women in Pakistan is still in dismal situation.

Gender equality is a popular slogan yet far from being achieved in Pakistan. Women are lag behind man in every sphere of life either it is political, economic social or health sector. There are number of factors that are contributing to gender inequality in Pakistan. Glass ceiling in different departments are a hurdle in achieving gender equality in Pakistan. Moreover, women participation in politics is like a drop in the ocean. In like manner gender pay gap is also an obstacle in achieving gender equality in Pakistan.

Similarly, societal taboos are attached with different profession like police, military. There is also a wrong interpretation of religion that is creating obstacle in achieving gender equality. However, government has taken certain initiative to achieve women empowerment in Pakistan. The initiative of pink bus services in Karachi and anti-sexual harassment laws are contributing to breaking obstacles to achieving gender equality. In like manner, women quota for women in civil service of Pakistan is also breaking stereotypes in Pakistani society. Similarly, many scholarships have been generated for females from lower strata of society. However, gender equality can be achieved by encouraging women to take part in digital economy. Moreover, by encouraging reasonable quota for women in policy making process will also play an important role in achieving gender equality.

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Gender inequality refers to the disparity between different genders with one gender enjoying a superior status and availing numerous privileges, while others genders must struggle to avail even the most basic rights. Despite calls for increased participation and inclusion of women in different spheres, the gender gap has widened by nearly 0.7% within the past year. Both in urban and rural areas, women are faced with a myriad of obstacles that prevent them from making their own decisions and empowering themselves. Due to patriarchal structure of society women are lag behind man in political, economic and social spheres.

To begin with, glass ceiling refers to an invisible systematic barrier that prevents female from rising to senior level positioning within an organization. Glass ceiling is an obstacle in achieving gender equality in Pakistan.

~~Women~~ For example, women encounter challenges like harassment, doubts about their abilities, and the expectation that they should dress in a sexually appealing manner. Women are not often encouraged to take influential positions in business sphere. According to International Labour Organization, the labour force participation rate of Pakistan is 32.88% for males and 15.57% for females which means male participation is 33.7% more than female participation rate. This report indicates the dismal condition of women and is highly upsetting and demotivating to feel like women are not worth it to take part in socio-economic development of a country. In like manner, women in Pakistan are not encouraged to take active parts in politics.

The participation of women in political sphere is like a drop in the ocean in Pakistan. Women from rural areas of Pakistan are often not allowed to cast their votes. As a result, women turnout remained

low in respecting constituencies. According to Election Commission of Pakistan, out of Pakistan's ~~men~~ nearly 106 million registered voters, only 44 percent are women. That's at least 6pc less than their actual proportion in the overall adult population. These issues are compounded at two level - eligible female voters not being registered on electoral rolls, and, more fundamentally, women are not being registered as citizen at all i.e. with Nadra through a CNIC. Similarly, women from lower strata of society are not encouraged to take active part in politics. The reserved seats for women in National Assembly and Senate are only for those women who have elite background. Similarly, gender pay gap. In a nutshell, it can be said that the situation of women in political sphere is not that much satisfying. In Pakistan Moreover, gender pay gap is also a hindrance in achieving socio-economic

development. In any part of world, women are contributing in socio-economic development of respective country. Women are striving for equal pay wages as they are contributing in equally in labour force. However, in Pakistan, according to international labour organisation; women's average monthly income is Rs 9,760 compared to men's monthly earnings of Rs 15,884, and only 0.3pc women are employed as managers, 6.4pc as professionals and 0.9pc as technical workers. Pakistan is placed 142 out of 146 countries, the bottom of both the regional and global ranking tables of the Gender Gap report 2023, published by the World Economic Forum. Thus, it can be said women in Pakistan are striving hard for equal pay in almost every profession. In addition to sexual harassment is another factor which is contributing in gender inequality in Pakistan. Pakistan's societal structure are based on patriarchal lines and almost every pillar of society is supporting this patriarchal structure. It is not piece of cake to dismantle

these patriarchal structure. First, women are not allowed to join professional life and if they are allowed by their families. Sexual harassment will be waiting on the professional foot step. Sexual harassment is causing depression and anxiety among female employers. Female employers are not allowed to speak it ~~pen~~ openly. Their senior employers or Bosses forced them for sexual favour in returns of their jobs. In 2020, the UN confirmed 2,500 cases of sexual harassment at work place. In such situation, women may experience all three form of gender based violence - psychological, physical and mental abuse. Hence it can be said that sexual harassment at work place at work place is creating hindrance to achieve gender parity in Pakistan. Because female workers are often reluctant to do work at such kind of places where working environment is not friendly.

Moreover, there is an increase ratio of gender disparity in media industry. Media sexism is

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a new term that is describing dismal state of affairs^{of women} in media industry. For example, only 9pc of stories highlight gender inequality concerns. Moreover, the journalistic lens in source selection is not only male-centric, but also focuses on a certain type of masculinity while selecting interviewees. Moreover, in different media outlets men are preferred over women in taking experts' opinion. For example, the data release by ministry of information reveals severe gender disparity. Only 16pc of print/broadcast reporters are women, and the number is even lower in print media alone. Thus, it can be said that media sexism is also a contributing factor in gender disparity in Pakistan.

Moreover, societal taboos and wrong interpretation of religion are entrenched in the minds of people in Pakistan. As the foundation of Pakistan is based on two-nation theory, people in Pakistan use religion for their own purposes. Same is the case with

Women empowerment in Pakistan
Pakistani society has its foundation on patriarchal structure. They misuse religion to suppress women. In stereotypical society, specially in rural areas of Pakistan women are striving to get education and accommodating basic health facilities. Many societal taboos are attached to women profession. For example, ~~it~~ it is not considered good to do jobs in military and police. This is totally wrong interpretation of religion. If a person looks at Islamic history, person will come to know that Hazrat Ayesha was first female muslim scholar and Hazrat Umm-E Rafida was first female voyage. Similarly, Hazrat Khadeeja R.A had owned a business. But in Pakistan this is said state of affair that people are using religion for their own sake. In a nut shell, it can be said that societal taboos and wrong interpretation of religion are contributing gender disparity in Pakistan.

Similarly, girls in Pakistan are malnourished due to gender discrimination. These girls are not taking active part in socio-economic development of country because they are weak and not physically fit to take active part in such kind of activities. A two days conference on malnutrition was held in Karachi in which Dr. Shabina Raza explained that in every one in seven (14 percent) women in Pakistan are undernourished while around four in 10 (38 percent) are overweight and obese. Anemia is approximately 42 percent while iron deficiency is seen in 18 percent of the women. These deficiencies cause complexity in their reproduction process. Thus, malnutrition is also impeding women in pursuing career and jobs.

However, Government of Pakistan has taken certain initiative to enhance women empowerment in Pakistan. Because no nation can rise the height of

glory unless its women are side by side. Women empowerment is necessary for socio-economic development of any country. In this context, the provincial government of Sindh has taken certain initiative to ensure decent transportation. The example is pink bus service in Karachi which is only for females. The sole purpose of this service is to facilitate working women so that they can take active part in their professions, without being worried about their transportation. Thus, it can be said that government of Pakistan is facilitating women and also engaging them in different profession.

In similar manner, government of Pakistan is also working on the implementation of sexual harassment laws. The sole purpose of these laws is to protect women at working places. It is necessary to implement

Such kinds of laws because a healthy environment is a pre-requisite for the mental health of female workers. Female workers are facing sexual harassment in different forms. This has a great impact on their mental and psychological wellness.

Female workers who face such kind of circumstances are usually in a state of anxiety and depression.

So this initiative of implementing sexual harassment laws are ~~appreciating~~ recognized as an important step in women empowerment. For example governmental step for women's rights are, protection against harassment of women at workplace act 2010, the acid control and acid prevention act 2011 etc-etc. Thus, it can be said that government is serious about women empowerment in Pakistan.

In addition to, government of Pakistan has realized ~~that~~ that no nation will get prosperity unless its women are taking active part in

the development of respecting country. Government have made efforts to bring women at par with men. These include: introducing 10 percent quota for women in higher position (especially the civil service) of the federal government, increasing women's representation in the National Assembly and senate, and ensuring their equal share of Prime minister's Youth Business Loan scheme. These are certain initiative that are taken by government of Pakistan to ensure women empowerment.

Similarly, women from lower strata of society are often discouraged to get higher education. Government has realized this graving situation that the ratio of women from marginalized group is minimum in Universities. So government has taken certain initiative like Aghaz-e-haqooq, E-balochistan, Higher education indigineous scholarship for female students, so that women from rural areas of Pakistan can take active part in

bringing prosperity in the country. Without education women will not realize their potential and their strength. So government initiative in this regard is condemnable. Thus, it can be said that government of Pakistan is serious about women empowerment.

However, certain measures can be taken to ensure women empowerment in Pakistan, in 21st century where there is technological advancement it is important to teach technological skills to women. So that women can take active part in digital economy as well. Digital economy is a new area through which women can get financial development independence. Financial independence is pivotal for women empowerment. Without financially stable no women will ever think about women empowerment. So it is important for factor to area

through which a female ~~can~~ can get financial independence. Digital economy is widespread phenomenon in current economy. Freelancing is an emerging field through which a female can get earning from home. In this process of freelancing, there is no need to leave home. Women can earn in millions by sitting at home. So for government it is an important area that can paved a way for economic and women empowerment.

Similarly, policy making is also an important factor in ~~the~~ women empowerment. It is necessary to increase female quota in policy making process. ~~the~~ Females can better know the loopholes in the society that are creating hurdle in women empowerment. So by ^{women} increasing reasonable quota in policy making process would be beneficial in women.

Policy making is an important factor in bringing reforms in any institution. If there ~~are~~ is reasonable quota in policy making process. Women friendly policies will be initiated that bring gender equality. This can lead to more balanced and inclusive policies, addressing issues that may disproportionately affect women. Moreover, increased female representation in politics can serve as a positive role model, inspiring other women to participate in civic engagement. Overall, it contributes to a more diverse and representative decision making body, fostering a more inclusive and equitable society.

In a nutshell, it can be said that gender inequality is a widespread phenomenon in Pakistan that is affecting every sphere of life either it is social, political or economic. Women in Pakistan

are lag behind ~~every~~ men in every profession. There are number of factor that are contributing in gender inequality in Pakistan. Glass ceilings, pink collar jobs, societal taboos, gender pay gape are obstacles in achieving gender equality in Pakistan. However, government of Pakistan has taken certain initiative to ensure women empowerment in Pakistan. Pink bus services, ~~anti~~ sexual harassment laws, increased women quota in national assembly and senat are great initiative by government of Pakistan. Moreover, certain measures can be taken to ensure gender equality in Pakistan. Government can take an initiative to get well versed in technology. Digital economy is an important area ~~to bring~~ through which women can get financial independence. Moreover, increased female representation in policy making process can serve as a positive role in the creation of equitable society.