

Women's backwardness in Pakistan

outline

1. Introduction

2. Analysis of women's backwardness in Pakistan

i. Women's literacy rate

ii. Maternal mortality rate

iii. Availability of food.

iv. proportion in jobs

v. Gender based wage differences

vi. Participation in political activities

vii. Incidents of domestic violence.

viii. Gender based crimes

3. Impacts of women's backwardness on different sectors of the country

a) Impacts on the social sector

i. Illiteracy and ignorance

ii. Uncontrolled population growth.

iii. Absence of health consciousness in the society.

iv. Provision of undisciplined and uncivilized members to the society.

b) Impacts on the economic sector

i. Negative impacts on GDP growth.

ii. Prevalence of poverty at domestic and national levels.

c) Impacts on the political sector

i. Weakening of democracy.

ii. Negation of fundamental human rights.

iii. Tarnished image of the state.

4. Factors responsible for the prevalence of women's backwardness

i. Extremely benighted approach of the clerics.

ii. Illiteracy and ignorance of men.

- iii - Absence of necessary resources
- iv - at domestic and national level.
- v - cultural and religious barriers
- vi - failure of the NGOs and state machinery to achieve the requisite targets

5. An analysis of some measures taken for the eradication of women's backwardness

- i - An overview of different laws
- ii - An overview of different programs

6. Recommendations for the empowerment of women in Pakistan

- i - Role of educational institutions in changing the mindset and spreading education.
- ii - Sharply focused and target oriented role of the media.

41

- iii. Spread of the moderate narrative of Islam.
- iv. Improvement in the performance of NGOs and other organizations.
- v. Enhancement of quota in government jobs and fixation of quota in private sector.
- vi. Impact of training and skill through the effective
- vii. contribution by the vocational training institutions.
- viii. Enhanced and easy access to loans for business.
- ix. Enactment and implementation of stringent laws.
- x. conduct of motivational sessions and workshops for men.
- xi. Target oriented role of the media and educational institutions in changing the mindset of the society.
- xii. Promotion of moderate narrative of Islam.

7. Conclusion

5/ Essay

Since its inception, Pakistan has been confronted with a number of such issues the resolution of which still seems to be a distant dream. Women's backwardness is one of the very same issues which have been challenging the writ of the government and civilization of level of the society even after seventy five years of independence. Pakistani women are backward and marginalized in a number of ways and almost all the sectors of the country suffer because of it. Lack of morality in the nation, poor GDP growth rate, unbridled growth of population, and vicious circle of poverty are some of the many repercussions of women's illiteracy.

ignorance, and backwardness. Quite understandably, the factors responsible for the situation are numerous in number and diverse in nature.

At the same time, it needs to be acknowledged that different governments in the country have taken many steps for uplifting women from the depths of

backwardness from time to time, yet it is also a reality

that the goal is still unachieved. It is, therefore, the

need of the hour that the already prevailing

strategies for women empowerment are meticulously

analyzed against the backdrop of the prevailing ground realities, and

some necessary amendments and additions are made to the same for

reaching the targeted

destination as early as possible.

has many manifestations in Pakistan. Low literacy rate, high maternal mortality rate, food insecurity, low economic participation, gender-based wage crimes are some of the many faces of the women's backwardness in Pakistan.

As per the Economic Survey of Pakistan 2022-23, the literacy rate of women is 51.9 pc which is perceptibly low as compared to the male literacy rate of 73.4 pc. At primary level, 52 pc of the girls are out of school - which is the second highest number of out of school girls in the world.

When comes to the health sector, the maternal

mortality rate in Pakistan is 186 per 100000 live births which is one of the highest in the world.

Likewise, women in Pakistan are the primary victims of food insecurity as the country ranks 99 out of 121 countries in the Global Hunger Index 2022.

The women's economic participation too presents a bleak picture. As per the report of Asian Development Bank, Pakistan has one of the lowest female labor force participation rate (23.32 pc in 2022) in South Asia and as per the Global Wage Report 2018-19 women in Pakistan earn 34pc less than men on average.

In terms of political participation, Pakistan has the widest gender gap in the political empowerment in which it lags behind with a 15.2 pc gender parity score and a ranking of 95th. As far as the gender based crimes are concerned, women in Pakistan are victims of child marriages (6th highest number in the world), denial of rights to inheritance, stove burning, dowry killing, and honor killing. At least 1000 women are killed for so-called honor every year in Pakistan. as per World Report 2023.

Having discussed the situation of women's backwardness in Pakistan, it is time to analyze the drastic impacts of the same on different sectors of the country.

To start with, women's backwardness gives birth to illiteracy and ignorance in the society simply due to the reason that these are women, who as mothers play the pivotal role in the upbringing of the new generation. The link between women's backwardness and illiteracy can be proved with the help of data as well, as in Pakistan the regions that appear to have the most illiterate population are the ones having the most backward and marginalized women, as well. FATA, and Baluchistan are incontrovertibly the most backward regions in terms of women's progress and development and the literacy rate. The proof is 43% and 28% respectively.

Women backwardness is a major cause of uncontrolled population growth rate of Pakistan that stands at 2.55% per annum making the population of the country 241.49 millions as per the latest census of 2023. In fact, backward women are neither aware of the use of contraceptives nor are given importance in the decisions related to family planning. Moreover backward women being unemployed afford time to give birth to new babies and take care of them while staying at home. All these factors result in continuous increase in the population that is an issue not only for the concerned family but for the country as well. In regional comparison, birth rate at

FATA and Baluchistan is much more than that of Punjab or well developed areas of KPK.

Women's backwardness is also a cause of a number of health issues in Pakistan. Most of the diseases that people of Pakistan usually suffer from are caused by lack of absence of awareness regarding preventive health care. This ignorance, quite understandably, has a direct link with the backwardness of women as an uneducated and herself ignorant women neither takes care of hygiene while cooking and serving food and eatables to her family, nor can maintain a clean and healthy environment at her home.

13) Likewise, a backward woman being uneducated is rarely sensitized to the precautions that are supposed to be taken against pandemics and other contagious diseases and as an outcome her whole family as well as the society suffer.

One of the most drastic and harrowing impacts of women backward is absence of morality and character in the nation as a whole.

Uneducated, ignorant, marginalized and down trodden women can never inculcate these traits and characteristics in their children that are immensely significant for creating a properly civilized nation. And this is, that has been damaging

Pakistan on all fronts.
Unfortunately, we are a
nation where no one is
capable of thinking beyond
his self-interest - howsoever
trivial it might be.
Our politicians and civil
servants take bribery
in the name of
commission and share.
Our shopkeepers are indulged
in hoarding, adulteration,
and profiteering; our
road users violate traffic
rules in a blatant
way with a vicious smile
on their faces; our
clerics intentionally promote
hated and fanaticisms;
our doctors and teachers
make their personal
businesses even when
they are at their
jobs at government
facilities; and our media
persons depend on black
mailing and yellow journalism.

for sunning their outlets.
This is what we are
as a nation, and the
absence of an active role
by the mothers in the
upbringing of the youth
due to their backwardness
is fully responsible for
it.

Women's backwardness
is a big hurdle to
the economic growth of
Pakistan as well. As women
constitute almost half of
Pakistan's population, absence
of their contribution to the
GDP creates such imbalance
that results in poor productivity
in agriculture, industry, and
service sectors. The role
that women can play
in the economic development
of a country can be
well understood by analyzing

growth model of Bangladesh where women have given a big boost to the clothing sector by working in factories and medium sized industrial units.

Just for the sake of analysis: Bangladesh GDP growth rate in FY 2022-23 was 7%, whereas of Pakistan, it was -0.9%.

Similarly, women's backwardness has been contributing to poverty at individual and national level in Pakistan. As per World Bank's report 2023, 37.2% of Pakistan's population lives below the poverty line. Because of women's absence as an economic contributor at domestic level, the whole burden of earning the bread falls on the shoulders of the male members of the family.

17 ↑ who due to large size of the family that too is an outcome of women's marginalization - can hardly fulfil their needs. Likewise, the deteriorated impact of women's backwardness on health of the family members do not let the workers work to their maximum potential and again the outcome is nothing else but poverty. This poverty at individual level lack a demand as well as lack of investment in the country and thus a vicious circle of poverty gets generated that keeps the state and the nation trapped in poverty net. This is that has been happening in Pakistan since its inception in 1947.

Finally, women's backwardness results in the denial of fundamental human rights, weak democracy, and tarnished image of the country at international level. All these issues which are political in nature have been creating a number of social and economic impediments for the country since decades and still no immediate change of situation is visible. The political frame of Pakistan can never be strong without the maximum participation of women who constitute half of the population.

Having discussed what backwardness of women have been doing with Pakistan, it is pertinent to have a brief overview of some of the factors

that are primarily responsible for women's backwardness in the country. Firstly, this is the benighted role of the clergy that is responsible for the prevailing circumstances. As Muslims have left the job of interpreting the religion only to the mullah, they (mullah) they on the basis of what have been taught in madrasahs keep issuing such fatwas in which women are not allowed to go out of their homes and do anything beyond procreating children. The fact that areas where clergy holds more sway have higher rate of illiteracy and backwardness among women vindicates the very same reality.

Secondly, illiteracy of men is also responsible for the illiteracy and backwardness of women. As approximately 30 percent of Pakistani male are completely illiterate and majority of those who are literate are just capable of reading and writing their names. The realization that women need to play an active role in the society rarely prevails in Pakistani society.

Similarly, absence of necessary facilities also keep women backward in a number of ways. Scarcity of educational institutions, absence of necessary facilities like washrooms and boundary walls, issues related to transportation, and unnecessary

and unsecure environment of work places keep girls and women away from becoming equal to men in practical life.

Social norms and cultural requirements in Pakistan are also responsible for women's being down trodden in our society. Early age marriages, desire for more and more male children, and denial of inheritance rights to women are some prevailing customs and traditions that keep women backward and deprived. Just for the sake of understanding, Muslims of Pakistan have inherited many traditions from their Hindu forefathers that have nothing to do with Islam.

The failure of state machinery and NGOs to successfully achieve their targets with reference to mainstreaming of women also deserves to be taken as a factor responsible for women's backwardness in Pakistan. There are a number of laws enacted to protect women, the only thing that is missing is their implementation; there are a number of programs initiated to support women, the only thing that is missing is transparency and accountability; and there are a number of national and international NGOs working for the betterment of women, the only thing that is missing is affectivity and efficiency, had all that was planned been done

accurately, women would not have been mixed in such an abysmal condition in Pakistan.

The government of Pakistan has taken certain measures for bringing women out of the backwardness.

The legislature in successive governments have enacted laws such as Protection of Women (Criminal Law Amendment) Act 2006, Prevention of Anti-Women Practices Bill 2008, Domestic Violence Bill 2010, The Acid Control and Crime Prevention Act 2011, The Domestic Violence Bill 2009, and Anti-Honor Killing Bill 2016 for providing women protection against crimes. For providing women more job opportunities, 10% quota has been fixed in the public sectors of the country.

M T W T F S

4 Benazir Kafalat program for providing cash to needy women. Benazir Nashonuma program for addressing the issue of malnutrition among children and pregnant women. Are some other efforts being made by the government under Benazir Income Support Program for uplifting socio-economic status of women.

Now before concluding the discussion, it is pertinent to suggest some measures that can be helpful in ameliorating the situation of women in Pakistan. First of all educational institutions need to work on changing the mindset of the students and eradicating illiteracy from the country.

25

Motivational lectures, speeches, discussions, simulations and practical exercises: everything should be used to inculcate in the minds of the youth that women are an equally important yet badly ignored component of the society and unless we all struggle for mainstreaming them, the dream of progress as a nation and a state can never be materialized.

Engaging the private sector in a systemized way can be helpful in bringing the out of school children to schools.

Likewise, media should also play a well-planned role in breaking the chains of chauvinism in Pakistan. Dramas, telefilms,

movies, songs, documentaries,
all tools of affecting
the mindset of the
people should be tactfully
used to enable women
to enjoy the status
and position they
deserve to do in the
country. PEMRA and PID
can provide the platforms
for collaborative efforts
of all media outlets
for the purpose.

In the same way,
efforts should be made
to promote the moderate
narrative of Islam. The
government should promote
moderate scholars through
electronic, print and social
media. The verses of the
Holy Quran, and the
sayings of the Prophet (SAW)
that are wrongly

interpreted to keep women
shackled within the boundaries

of the houses should be explained in detail along with their back ground and objectives so that the myth that women are not allowed to play an active role in the society is successfully challenged.

The role that NGOs and national and international organizations are playing in Pakistan for empowering women needs to be improved.

The efforts of these organizations should be synchronized to minimize the duplication of work that results in wastage of time and resources.

The mechanism that is used to evaluate the performance of these organizations should be

28

improved and made more specific and target oriented to correctly assess the on-ground contribution made by these organizations.

Just like the public sector, job quota should be fixed for women in private organizations as well. Enactment of laws followed by their strict implementation can be helpful for the purpose of tax concession to organizations having more than fifty percent female workforce or any other such step can prove to be a motivation for private entrepreneurs.

Finally, imparting skills and grant of interest free loans can also be helpful.

In promoting women entrepreneurship in Pakistan.

The government should engage organizations like AKHwat and AKRSP for the purpose.

Likewise, the administrative machinery should be

screwed to strictly implement

the laws enacted for

the protection in Pakistan.

Establishment of some special

courts for women related

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the country and is
incontestably responsible.
for a number of social,
political, and economic
issues that Pakistan is
and has always confronted
with. A scrupulous analysis
reveals that there are
a number of factors that
have brought the situation
to the point it is at
the moment. Realizing the
harrowing consequences of
women's backwardness and
in order to respond to
the global pressure, every
government in Pakistan
has taken some measures
for pulling women out of
the depths of deprivation
and privation, yet the
requisite goals could not
be achieved fully.
Some measures, including
a more focused role
of educational institutions

and media, promotion of the moderate narrative of Islam, and fixation of job quotas in private organization can certainly be helpful in women empowerment in Pakistan.

From empowering women, the first thing that is required to be done is changing the mindset not only of men but also of women. As long as women are not considered to be an equal human being, every effort to bring the change will go in vain. Merely saying that women are equal to men is different from truly realizing it. Most of Pakistanis, unfortunately, are the supporters of women's empowerment just to the extent of statements while their

actions are diametrically
opposed to what they say.
One should hope, the
requisite change in
the mind set does not
take much time before
it actually comes in
our society, and every
Pakistani starts playing
his role in the
uplifting of women.