

"Can Women Be Equal to Men in Pakistan"

1. Introduction

Thesis statement: In Pakistan's gender stratified society the question of women achieving parity with men is pivotal. Women cannot be equal to men because of entrenched cultural norms and lack of efforts towards their empowerment. This is evident from low literacy rates and their underrepresentation in social, political and economic life.

2. Status of Women in Pakistan

3. Women cannot be equal to men in Pakistan (Thesis)

- a. Women representation in politics is low.
- b. Lack of access to quality education.
- c. Poor representation of women in military forces.
- d. Low participation of women in workforce.
- e. Women are expected to be caretakers and home makers.

4. Women can be equal to men in Pakistan (Antithesis)

- a. Women representation in politics has increased overtime.
- b. Government initiatives have increased the number of school going girls.
- c. Notable progress in women military participation (General Nigar Johar).
- d. Women are making strides in Pakistan's workforce. Case studies: Shirmeen Obaid Chinoy, Roshanah Zafer.
- e. Growing feminist movements are challenging patriarchal norms.

5. Despite progress women's trajectory towards gender parity is insignificant.

a. Female politicians continue to face myriad of challenges .

b. Government initiatives in education sector remain inadequate

c. No women has ever been inducted in combat divisions of military

d. Deeprooted biases and discriminatory practices in workforce .

e. Continuation of gender based violence threaten lives of Pakistani women .

6. Conclusion .

In a distant village of Pakistan, a young girl finds herself standing by a stove, contemplating the dramatic turn her life has taken. Once brimming with aspirations of becoming a doctor, her dreams shattered when one day she returned from college, only to be informed by her mother that her marriage has been fixed. Now here she was living with an abusive partner. One resounding question reverberated in her mind: What if I were a man? Leaving her to ponder possibilities that might have unfolded if societal norms didn't constrain her. This is the story of numerous Pakistani girls whose dreams get shattered because of their gender. In Pakistan's gender stratified landscape, the question of women achieving equality with men is contentious and pivotal. Women cannot be equal to men in Pakistan because their representation in political system of Pakistan is relatively low, women have limited access to quality education. Even if they manage to enter into workforce, they face gender pay gaps and workplace discrimination. Though women are striving for equality, the journey towards achieving equal status is a challenging one.

Gender equality means equal life opportunities, equal access to resources and freedom for men and women. The state of Pakistan is far from achieving gender equality. According to World Economic Forum's (WEF) Global Gender Gap Report 2023, Pakistan has been ranked 142 out of 146 countries — with a 57.5 percent gender parity — the highest since 2006. One in every 4 women has experienced intimate partner violence at least once in her lifetime. Women are lagging in every field of life.

Women in Pakistan do not only suffer from domestic inequalities in terms of resources but their access to outside resources like education, employment and healthcare is minimal and support from government or non governmental organizations is nominal. Patriarchal structures embodied in kinship, division of labour, violence and class hierarchy has further reinforced subordination of women and their dependence of men.

In Educational domain challenges persist in ensuring equal opportunities and outcomes. Girls in distant regions face barriers such as limited access to quality education, early marriages and societal expectations that prioritize traditional roles over academic pursuits. The lower literacy rate is a significant barrier to achieving gender equality. According to UNESCO the male literacy rate is 69.29% while for females is 46.49% showcasing a big gap between sexes. With such a significant gender gap in literacy rates, gender equality in Pakistan is not possible.

The lower participation of women in politics hinders their equality with men. This limited engagement is evident in underrepresentation of women in political offices, where their voices remain marginalized. Women make up only a fraction of parliamentary seats in Pakistan. According to article 51, 60 seats for women are reserved in National Assembly whereas 17 seats are reserved in the Senate of Pakistan, reflecting the challenges they face in gaining political influence. This disparity hinders in sociopolitical

growth of women.

In addition to this, women's limited involvement in military reflects a significant disparity in this crucial sector. The limited participation of women in military is a result of deeply entrenched notion that ~~traditional~~ ^{certain} professions, especially those related to defense, are predominantly for men. This lack of representation reinforces the societal perception that women are not as capable for military. As long as the number of seats for women ^{in military} are not made equal to men in Pakistan, men and women cannot be regarded as equal in Pakistan.

Moreover, the participation of women in workforce is relatively low. While educated women struggle to enter and stay in the workforce, women with low education levels face even more limitations. This low female participation has implications for women empowerment, as working women are more likely to play a role in household decisionmaking compared with non working women in villages or even same families. According to World Bank, the workforce participation rate in women is 23%. Unless there is a considerable increase in women participation in workforce, achieving gender equality will remain a distant dream.

Furthermore, societal expectations confine women to the roles of homemakers and caregivers, restricting their access to diverse opportunities. This cultural

norm reinforces the belief that a woman's primary duty is within the domestic realm, limiting her potential for professional and personal growth. Supporting this, statistics highlight the unequal burden of unpaid labor and domestic work placed on women. These societal expectations are hindering the social uplift of women.

Conversely, some analysts argue that women can be equal to men in Pakistan as evidenced by the notable rise of women as candidates and voters. In the 2018 elections of Pakistan saw a significant rise in women's voters turnout and more women contested for political offices compared to previous governments. In addition to this the no. of reserved seats in Pakistan's national assembly has provided a dedicated space for female voice, contributing to more inclusive political landscape. Election of women like Asma Jahangir, Shehryar Rehman to prominent political position showcases an active role of women in politics and policymaking. This serves as a leading step towards equality of women.

Furthermore, while challenges exist in educational sector the number of girls going to school has been increasing. Government and Nongovernmental institutions are playing a significant role in this regard. Government has announced to establish a network of Danish schools in far flung areas of Balochistan to enroll out of school children. The Girls Education Challenge (GEC) had two "leave no girls" behind projects in Pakistan which improved learning opportunities

and outcomes for over 40,500 of most marginalised girls. The progress of women in education sector will increase their life opportunities and will result in a higher social mobility.

Furthermore, it is true that the percentage of women in military in high ranking position remains disproportionately low but for the past few years noteworthy strides are being made to breakdown gender barriers and promote women to high ranking positions. The appointment of General Nigar Johar to the rank of Lieutenant General is a landmark achievement. Similarly Pakistan Airforce has played a significant role in breaking down the stereotypes in a traditionally male dominated society. In 2006 first four female pilots batch was inducted. The accomplishment of women in military are a testament that women can achieve parity with men.

Women workforce is another indicator of how women can gain equal standing as men in the society. The effort of women in various fields like technology, finance, entrepreneurship and challenging stereotypes showcases their abilities. The rise of successful women like Roshanah Zafer, the founder of Kashaf foundation reflects the increased contribution of women in economy. High profile success stories like Shirmeen Chaudhary exemplifies the potential of women to excel in diverse profession.

Furthermore, while societal expectations may influence traditional gender roles in Pakistan, there is a growing movement challenging these norms. Many women are breaking free from traditional constraints, pursuing diverse opportunities in education,

employment and leadership. Initiatives promoting women's empowerment and changing attitudes towards gender roles indicate a shift towards more inclusive opportunities for women in Pakistani society. Although challenges persist the ongoing transformations challenging restrictive expectations foster a path towards greater gender parity.

Having examined the challenges and counter arguments surrounding equality in Pakistan, it is crucial to delve into arguments supporting the thesis.

Despite claims of progress, formidable obstacles persist in Pakistan's educational sector, especially for girls casting a doubt on the true extent of progress. While the number of school going girls may have improved overtime, the challenges like early marriages, ^{poverty} and societal expectations persist and impede their access to education. Despite efforts of governmental entities, the effectiveness of these programs remain questionable. According to World Bank at current rate it will take Pakistan at least 50 years to enroll all girls and 31 years to enroll all boys to school.

Moreover, apart from the low representation of women in politics, women who reached prominent positions continue to face hurdles. Female politicians are subjected to character assassination, sexual harassment. They are not respected as they have less reserved seat. Political parties often consider women as passive vote bank and use them for representative functions.

like public gatherings, meetings and campaigns. As far as ~~concern~~ women voters are concerned, mostly women vote by the choice of their male relatives and are expected to follow the choice of men. Thus the increase in women voters doesn't reflect that the status of women has improved in society or the gender gap is reducing as women who vote are still dependent on their male counterparts.

Moreover, it's true that a few women, like Nigar Johar have reached high ranking positions in the army. The overall number of women in such roles remain significantly low. Despite thousands of women being inducted into the Pakistan armed forces in the last 5 years, there is still no policy to include them in crucial departments ^{like} infantry and armor. According to a report the presence of female officers in the Pakistan Army is approximately 3500 with around 2400 serving in Armed Forces Nursing Service and 600 female doctors holding ranks from captain to major general. This limited representation ~~represents~~ highlights the need for broader policies to promote gender parity.

In addition to this, despite claims of progress deep root biases and discriminatory ~~work~~ practices present formidable obstacles to women advancement in workforce. Systematic biases such as unequal access to opportunities and entrenched stereotypes overall impede female participation in professional life. Unequal access to quality education and familial expectations perpetuate a gender gap. Startling statistics reveal that a substantial percentage of women continue to face discrimination and unequal opportunities.

Furthermore, despite strides in feminist movement the plight of Pakistani women remains concerning. This dire condition of women is evident in continuation of harmful practices and gender based violence. Honor killings and the practice of Satti reflects deeply ingrained societal issues that threaten the rights and lives of Pakistani women. Tragic incidents like Gandeel Baloch, who was asphyxiated and strangled to death by her brother in the name of honor highlight the harsh reality. Such incidents highlight the significant disparity that exists in Pakistani Society.

Conclusively, one may say that while progress has been made, the journey for women towards gender parity remains slow and challenging. The extensive road ahead for women to attain equality with men is marked by deep rooted cultural practices and insufficient efforts acting as a formidable barriers to progress. Pakistani girls face obstacles in accessing quality education, female politicians navigate multifaceted challenges with a predominantly male landscape. Deep seated stereotypes and discriminatory practices impede women's holistic participation in professional spheres, while instances of domestic violence underscore persistent gender inequalities. Gender equality in Pakistan remains a distant dream. However, in the wise words of Nelson Mandela, "It always seems impossible until it's done". Let this be a constant reminder that with sustained efforts, there is a hope for better future of women in Pakistan.