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The Evolving Role of women in leadership and decision making

The role of women in leadership and decision-making is evolving due to increased access to education, legal reforms, global gender equality movements, and economic participation. This transformation is reshaping traditional power structures by enabling women to lead in political, social, and economic spheres through institutional inclusion, capacity-building initiatives, and shifting cultural attitudes.

Outline

- 1- Introduction
- 2- Understanding women empowerment
(United Nations definition)
- 3- Historical perspective on women in leadership
(pre-modern societies, cultural and religious norms,

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enlightenment period, and
21st century)

4- Evolving status of women in society

(wide spread gender bias,
representation gap in business,
lower women labour force)

5- Expanding roles of women in leadership

a- Increasing leadership
roles in marriages

(arrang marriages rate
dropped 15% - UNICEF)

b- Growing roles of women
in senior management.

(34% senior management
roles as of 2024)

c- Taking part in business
partnerships ownership

(13 million women owned
enterprises in U.S generated

3.3 million jobs - National
Women's Business Council Report)

d- Increasing role in public
sector leadership across
politics

- (27.2% parliamentary seats, 22.9% cabinet ministers — IPU-UN women in politics)
- e- Dominates global health workforce but not leadership.
(70% of health workers, 25% of senior leadership)
- f- Leading Educational institutes
(54% — Worldmetrics)
- g- Increased Gender Quota increases presence in Governance
(130 countries adopted gender quota; Rwanda leads with 61% women in parliament — UN women, 2023)
- h- Women in municipal and grassroots leadership
(In India, 33% reservation for women — World Bank, 2022)
- i- More women in executive roles
(In 2024, 28% C-Suit roles globally — McKinsey, women in work force report, 2024)

j- Women outpacing men in higher educational attainments (degrees in business, law; 60% university graduates are women — UNESCO global education report).

k- Women leading community based organization (70% community based NGOs led by women — UNDP).

l- Rising access to inheritance and property rights. (46% increase in the property claims in India — World Bank, 2023).

6- Challenges to women participation in decision-making (Patriarchy, religious and cultural norms, status quo).

7- Women in leadership: The case study of Pakistan

(Under representation; 17% of NA seats held by women, 5% of universities VC are women)

8- Strategies to strengthen women's decision making power

9- Conclusion

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From personal to social sphere of life, women are the integral part of life. Without the active and participatory role of women, all the spheres of life will dismally function. The role of women in leadership and decision making-making is evolving due to increased access to education, legal reforms, global gender equality movements and economic participation. This transformation is reshaping traditional power structures by enabling women to lead in political, social and economic spheres through institutional inclusion, capacity-building, initiatives and shifting cultural-attitude. In history women had little leadership role due to the cultural and religious barriers; however, after

the enlightenment period, they saw increase in their leadership role. Despite the increase in their participation, there spread wide gender gap in social and economic spheres around the world. Though limited but their roles are expanding. Women decision making roles in their marriages increased. Their roles in senior management, business ownership, public sector leadership and global health workforce also increased. Further, they are also dominating educational institutes, governing bodies and grassroots municipal leadership. Their roles in executive, NGOs, educational institutes and inheritance rights boost their decision-making capacity. Women participation in decision-making is still challenged in Pakistan and the world.

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alike. ~~Prara~~ Pragmatic measures in time will strengthen their decision-making power.

Women empowerment empowers women in leadership and decision-making. It is the process of giving power to women in education, family, social, political, economic, and other spheres of life. United Nations Women Development defines it as the increase in the power of women in socio-political and economic spheres. Women with economic independence are at a better position to take their decisions themselves. Similarly, increasing their powers in political spheres will let them to take independent decisions. It is, therefore, women empowerment that enables them to take sovereign decisions.

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Historically, women had negligible roles in leadership. They were rather not given the right to freedom. In old ages they were considered worthless. In the pre-modern societies, women had limited political and military leadership roles. Queen Nzinga of Angola led resistance against portugese colonies in 1600. This proves their limited military roles. Further, the cultural and religious norms, following the pre-modern societies limited their leadership to private spheres. In the ancient cultures, women were forbade to hold an office and vote. Later, in the enlightenment period, the thinkers of that also saw women as subordinate in intellectual and political rights. Rousseau

wrote that women should be to please men, not to lead. Other philosophers of that time also considered them subordinate to men. Hence, from ancient ages, to pre-modern societies to enlightenment era, women had limited leadership roles.

Following the 20th century, the status of woman evolved but wide spread gender bias and representation gap remained dominant. In the 20th century, women claimed political rights: right to vote. United Nations Women endorsed that the 20th century women gained rights of woman. After the 20th century, gender biasness remained dominant across the world. 90% of men and women across the world hold gender biased views, 25% justify wife beating as quoted by UNDP's Gender

social norm index 2023. Similarly there was a wide gap in political and business spheres. From 2020-23, women held 27% parliamentary, 28% managerial seats in the Southern Asia - UN Women and UNDESA. In short, the gap between men and women in the decision making, remained dominant even after the 20th century.

However, the roles of women in leadership and decision making remained expanding from day to day.

To start with, women's leadership and decision making roles in personal spheres increased with time. Previously deprived of decision-making, women are now making way to

to take independent decisions. This is evident from the fact that women's role in taking the decisions about their marriages increased significantly. As seconded by UNICEF, South Asia, 2023, arrange marriages dropped by 15% in Bangladesh and Nepal. Women taking the decisions of choosing their partners is an example of their decision-making role. Hence, women roles in making decisions in personal spheres have been increased in the past decades.

Secondly, women are also occupying senior management roles which enables them to lead. Women were considered docile, but their continuous struggle led them to grow and excel in senior management roles.

In the recent years, many senior management positions in the public and private sectors are increasingly being occupied by women. According to the Gender Gap Index, 2024, 34% of senior management roles are held by women as of 2024. These were only 19.4% in the past 20 years. This shows that women leadership roles are also increasing in the senior management spheres.

Thirdly, women are also increasingly owning businesses. They are taking part in businesses which will allow them to have greater decision-making roles. A large number of able women across the world owned enterprises, instead of just working as a labour and subordinate. According to the

National Women's Business Council Report, in United States alone, 13 million women owned enterprises generated 2.3 million jobs and added \$1.9 trillion in revenues since 2019. Women's part taking in personal businesses provides jobs and more income, along with their own financial independence. Thus, the evolving role of women in business ownership not only helps in leadership but also proves to be a good source of employment and income.

Further, women role in public sector leadership is also increasing across politics. Their increasing roles in politics enhances their leadership and decision making. From parliamentary

seats to cabinet ministers, women are excelling in political sphere also. Around 27.2% of parliamentary seats and 22.9% of cabinet ministries are occupied by women, as per the reports of UN women in politics. The statistics shows that women now inclined towards public sector politics also. Overall, their increasing number in parliament ~~there~~ suggests their evolving roles in decision-making.

Furthermore, women also dominates global health workforce along with different leadership roles. Previously, in the health sector, where women are highly need, women ~~was~~ participation was very low. Now, they are dominating in health workforce against their counterparts. In the world, women are $\frac{3}{4}$

of the health labours. According to Britannica, women health force, women are 70% global health workers and 25% senior leadership. This clearly shows their increasing number in health sectors. Therefore, women are increasingly leading the global health and managerial positions also.

Moreover, in the evolving leadership of women, they are also leading educational institutes. Educational institutes are the key to leadership. Women are globally leading Educational institutes where minds are made. According to worldmetrics, 54% of educational institutes are led by women. This report suggests that are now leading all the social spheres. Therefore, the roles of women are

MOTOWOTOFOSO

expanding in education also.

In addition, increased gender quota also increases women leadership role in governance. The most competitive field, governance, requires a conducive and supportive path for women to take part. Gender Based quota is one of these paths which helps in bringing women into leadership. This is exemplified by the fact that 130 countries adopted quotas; Rwanda leads with 61% women in parliament - UN Women, 2023. This conducive method assists women in taking part in governance. Hence, women role in governance is expanding due to the gender quota adopted by countries.

To add to that, women's role also expand in

municipal and grassroot leadership. Municipal leadership is mandatory to effectively convey, communicate ~~to~~ and implement policies.

The increasing focus of women in the grassroot leadership signifies their decision-making roles. The Third world countries are focusing on the increasing number of women in municipal & leadership to empower them. According to a report of World Bank, 2022, In India, 33% reservations are fixed for women in the municipal leadership. Such measures encourages their role and participation in domestic local governances. In short the roles of women are also expanding in grassroot leadership.

Besides, women are increasing in executive

roles which further empowers them in leadership and decision making. To maintain balance in a society, the need of women is necessary ~~also~~ in executive roles also. Executive role of women in both private and public sector is necessary. Women are increasing in both the sectors. In 2024, 28% C-Suit roles globally were occupied by women - McKinsey, women in Work force report, 2024. This shows that they are increasingly occupying C-Suit roles globally. Hence, expanding roles of women is also evident in the executive level which renders them leadership and decision-making power.

In the same way, women are outpacing men in higher educational attainments. They are increasing

in every higher level degrees - that were previously male dominant. Women are getting admissions in more practical and professional fields like business and Law. These degrees enable them to have good and leading roles in a society. A report of Global Education by UNESCO mentioned that in US, 60% university graduates are women. This proves their increasing number in higher educational attainments. Hence, the women role are expanding in leadership as they are outpacing men in higher educational attainments.

Likewise, women are leading community based organizations which enhances the decision making roles. Commun

ity based organizations work for the welfare of people. Women directly participate in this. More & women are joining these community based organizations. They are also encouraged by these organizations to take part. According to United Nations Development Programme, 70% of Community Based NGOs are led by women. This large number of women participation in leading the organizations proves their leading leadership and decision-making.

Last but not least, rising access of women to inheritance and property rights shows expanding role of women in leadership. Women are generally not given their rights of property in the property of parents.

and husbands. This remained a norm in South Asian countries. However, they have struggled, and they are rising their access to inheritance and property. This is seconded by the World Bank report, 2023. The report states that 46% increase in the property claims in India have observed the past couple of years. Hence, the role of expanded in decision-making with the rising access to inheritance and property rights.

Apart from the expanding roles of women in leadership, they are facing multifaceted challenges in decision making. Patriarchy is one of the challenges that Asiatic in the path of women leadership in South Asian

countries. These developing countries are dominated by patriarchal norms. In these countries, societies are men centric. Women are limited to some particular domains, and they kept subordinate. Pakistan is one of such countries. Further, the religious and cultural norms are also restricting women leadership. In a number of religious and cultural studies, women are not allowed to lead, and they are allowed to do home chores only. On the other hand, the men try to maintain status quo. All these challenges are bottle-necks in the women's participation in leadership.

Women in Pakistan also have negligible role in leadership. They are

dominated by men in the social, political, economic, legal and religious spheres. Women in ^{the} Pakistan's politics of ~~have~~ Pakistan have limited representation. 17% ~~perso~~ of National Assembly seats are held women. Only 5% of universities VCs are women. These statistics show a grim picture of women leadership in Pakistan.

With the help of pragmatic strategies, women decision making power can be strengthened to a great extent. Firstly, educating women and spreading the awareness regarding their innate rights ~~smoothen~~ their way to leadership. Secondly, proper and correct interpretation of religious studies will also help them to have better decision making roles. The Holy

in Surah Al-Nisa, and instances from the life of Holy prophet clearly stresses on giving these rights to women to empower them. In addition, active and supportive laws can also strengthen them in decision-making. Therefore, these strategies if implemented could strengthen women leadership & power.

To conclude, ~~the~~ owing to the increased access to education, legal reforms, global gender equality movements and economic participation the role of women in leadership and decision making is evolving. This is reshaping the traditional power structure where men was dominant. Hence, leading to women's social, political, ^{and} economic leadership.