

Essay Title: Gender Equality is a myth!

Outline;

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(2) Gender Equality: Equality of opportunities, roles, responsibilities, rights

(3) Reasons why Gender equality is a myth, in context of Pakistan;

(i) Role of family in enculturation and socialization

(ii) Impact of education on gender inequality

(iii) Misinterpretation of religion to promote male dominance

(iv) Propagation of discriminatory ideas through culture, media, art

(v) Patriarchal social fabric

(vi) Policy-making without gendered lens

(4) Manifestations of gender inequality in different aspects of life;

(i) Political arena: Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) & Take parties

(ii) Society: Parallel systems like Jirgas (Mukhtar Mai case)

(iii) Employment: Global Gender Gap Index - 2025

(iv) Gender-based Violence: Honour-killings, rapes, stone deaths

(v) Healthcare: PCOS, PTSD, Breast cancer etc.

(vi) Technology: GSMA Special Mobile Association (GSMA) report on Digital Divide: Deep-fake AI videos targeting women

(5) Gender Inequality globally versus in Pakistan

(6) Future prospects regarding gender equality;

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- (iv) Integration of feminist theorists with practical implementation
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Men belong to the office, and nobody. But, it's a commonly heard phrase that women belong to the kitchen. In theory, we have equality for all, justice only available to everyone and transparent practices everywhere. However, in reality, equality is just another idea of an ideal world. Gender equality refers to equal opportunities in every sphere of life regardless of one's gender. However, it is a myth in Pakistan due to an overwhelming role of patriarchy, culture, religion, mainstream media and collective propagation of misogynistic ideals. All these factors contribute to a subjugative role of women in every aspect of their lives e.g. economy, employment, social standing, healthcare, technology and political arena.

Equality of opportunity is the main idea of gender equality as it means everyone, whatever their gender identity be, will have access to resources needed for their survival and thriving. The rights and responsibilities will be of equal proportions. The benefits will be equally enjoyed by all. No one will be restricted from any ~~step~~ legal practice or activity. Everyone can acquire education, employment, healthcare facilities, property etc. as per their wish and requirement.

Pakistan is a patriarchal society. The public spaces and public arena is predominantly handled by male members of the society. Decision-making is by default done by men. Women are taught very young that they should meet the expectations of the family. They should be submissive, helpful, caring and respectful. Their needs are secondary, the scarce resources are distributed such that they are sufficient for the breadwinners (men) and whatever is left is given to the second citizens (women). This idea has been discussed in the book, "For Preference in South Asia". Teaching women young is part of the enculturation done

by the family members, mostly mothers. The theory of Looking Glass Self by C. H. Cooley discusses how ~~we~~ people are molded to fit in the world by assuming certain traits and labels. People try to live up to those labels and identities. Hence, it is collective effort to teach women their roles and responsibilities to ensure the preservation of status-quo.

The second place of learning after family are educational institutes. Girls and boys learn their appropriate behavior from their schools, peers, close friends and relatives. The idea of gender inequality prevails here as well. Girls and young women are taught to focus on non-technical subjects like social sciences, arts, language, literature, etc., while we teach men and boys technical subjects such as mathematics, physics, engineering, architecture etc. Literature itself is full of iconic philosophers such as Aristotle who believed that female is a deformed male. This ensures that women never learn that they are equal, while they will never learn they will never demand. Learning itself is a beautiful experience and John Locke's theory of Tabula Rasa explains it magnificently that our mind is a blank slate and everyone is equally capable of learning new information. However, through education, gender inequality is ~~also~~ reinforced.

Another important stakeholder in this equation is religion. Islam itself is a religion of peace as the name implies. However, muslims are not taught Arabic in detail. We just learn to read it but we are unable to comprehend it on our own. Our textbooks rely upon religious clerics who are inherently part of the same society and culture that subjugates women. My interpretation of religion is done to justify heinous crimes like domestic violence, marital rape, honour killings. Scholars like Tarek Ramadan tell on live television that ~~they~~ we should not let women drive as they will get liberty to go anywhere, Salim Aden calls ninety-five percent women 'Jahil' and in a conversation that is aired live, further adds to the already violent practices towards women. Angels will curse a woman who refuses to perform her marital duties, all night long is always quoted to force women into intimacy. However, angels curse anyone who commits

negligence of their worldly duties, not just women. As believers of faith, it is our responsibility to ensure that correct interpretation of religion is done and religious scholars should promote tolerance in the society rather than using it as a tool of controlling women.

From the religious perspective to the world of entertainment, every aspect leads to gender inequality if viewed from a sensitive ~~gendered~~ gendered lens. ~~From~~ Ancient tales of purjahi folk ~~the~~ literature such as Heer Ranjha, Sohni Mahiwal etc. have been a part of our culture. The portrayal of women as traitors in these folk tales is problematic. If we see western art, we see explicit paintings of women and adult content but portrays women as objects and not human. This content when consumed by the masses ~~the~~ shapes the ideology of people that consider women as exotic and men as the norm. Propagation of all these ideas is done by media nowadays leading to a larger gap between women and men.

The gap between both genders is further ~~also~~ exaggerated by the problematic social fabric. Stereotypes are used and propagated to ensure that women ~~do~~ never forget their true place i.e. "Clean Densari". Social Learning Theory is useful in this case as both genders learn that women and men are not equal in their status though the cultural practices seen in society. Linda de Beauvoir said, "Men learn his power." He learns it through the preference given to him at home, best resources allocated for him, social acceptance provided to him by default, the approval given to his opinion and dreams. ~~The~~ Culture is finely weaved into social fabric that ensures ~~that~~ gender gap between the men and women of the society.

Society itself stands as the pillars of economy. Economy decides where the resources will be generated from, priorities will decide who will benefit from these resources. Developing countries like Pakistan often have to get loans from financial institutions such as International Monetary Fund (IMF). IMF gives out loans based on some conditions called Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs). SAPs are designed to cut down a governmental expenditure. The first

foremost target of such policies social development programmes such as infrastructure development, healthcare, education etc. Women are already victims of gender inequality, less resource, allocated to these departments, further marginalizes half of the country's population. The popular & dominant ^{world} economic system, Capitalism serves only a small percentage of the ^{world's} population. Business Tycoons. Market is established such as women are always involved in catching up to the latest shopping trends. Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) is created to exploit the women. Pink taxes are higher than blue taxes, meaning that feminine products are expensive than masculine ones. Economy also rests on the exploitability of the already subjugated community.

All the factors discussed beforehand lead to ~~the~~ real ~~time~~ world manifestations of gender inequality. In the world of politics, women are not given actual authority rather some token positions to fulfill the global obligation of female participation. Female politicians are often considered weak and incapable of governance. Refusal of general to salute female prime Minister Beazir Bhutto, declaration of Fatima Jinnah as a traitor, character assassination of Shere Muzir are some of the many examples that we see in political area. When women are in policy making but they are not given the respect and authority they deserve to have, gender gap will eventually be greater, ~~as~~ it is at the moment.

Apart from the official system, there are many informal parallel systems running alongside the governmental practices. These include Jirgas where the elders men of the tribe decide upon the matters of the community. They derive their power from the common people that believe and accept their legitimacy. Their decisions are derogatory in terms of preserving ~~the~~ women's dignity. For example, Mukhtara Mai was given punishment of gangrape because of her brother was ~~said to be~~ allegedly found guilty of having an illegitimate affair with a woman of a powerful tribe. This is one of the many cases reported and ~~unreported~~ there are dozens of cases that go unreported. Society gives women punishment for the crimes they have not committed, leading to gender inequality.

Escape from these systems is possible if women are financially independent. The prerequisite of employment is education which is considered a state responsibility as per Article 25-A of the Constitution of Pakistan. However, women are not educated enough to secure employment. Even if they do, workplace harassment does not leave them alone. Global Gender Gap Index 2025 ranks Pakistan at 146th position, the last one. This clearly shows the state of affairs. Women are forced to leave their jobs and careers after getting married. According to Labour Survey Report 2020-2021, thirty-six thousand doctors are unemployed or chose not to serve. This is a waste of their potential and a way to control women financially so that they cannot make independent decisions as per their will.

When women are financially dependent upon their husbands, fathers, sons or brothers, they cannot escape the decisions taken for them by the male members of their families. They are married off to dysfunctional households where their opinion is not respected. Domestic violence is everyday business. According to Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, over ninety percent of women in Pakistan had faced domestic violence in their lifetime by the year 2020. Honour-killings are occurring too often but it is now a matter of insensitivity and new normal. Sakeer, a woman from Balochistan who dared to marry for love & was mercilessly murdered along with her husband. Is this the way a country establishes gender equality? Is a question asked by people every now and then.

Violence does not stop here, it leads to deprivation of basic human needs: healthcare. Human Rights Commission of Pakistan's Report established that 70% of women in Pakistan do not have access to basic healthcare. Furthermore, a study conducted by UNFPA revealed that less than 33% of women have autonomy regarding sexual and reproductive health rights in Pakistan. Women are anaemic and not just few of them, as per UN Women's data 50% of women are anaemic. Breast cancer, ovarian cancer, PCOS, PTSD, Post-partum depression, ~~every~~ all these issues are common in Pakistani women. Mental health

is far off the radar of problems faced by women as mental health issues are often disguised as 'black magic', 'nazar' as 'pagalpan' to avoid their addressal. It is often said that health is wealth and clearly Pakistani women are the poorest of them all.

Awareness of one's issues, rather than be mental health related or related to other important areas of life such as politics, education, ~~etc~~ economy etc. ~~are~~ depends directly on the access of technology to women. A survey conducted by GSMA revealed that differential between male and female access to internet comes to 38 pc. Women are not allowed to have a digital presence as it is considered indecent to be on social media as a woman. Cyber-bullying becomes the destiny of women who choose to be active on social media activists, bloggers, content creators and influencers. Tiktokers, Sara Yousof is a recent example of how dreams are shattered by psychopathic stalkers online. As use of AI is getting popular, deepfake videos are being made by men to blackmail women. 99% of ~~these~~ these fake videos are targeted towards women. This only aggravates the existing problems women face due to discriminatory practices against them.

Gender equality is not only the destiny of Pakistani women but ~~are~~ ~~it~~ also globally women face such problems. World Health Organization has established that one out of every three women have been subjected to either physical or/and sexual intimate partner violence. These practices may be a little less in other parts of the world but they are not non-existent. If policy-making is ~~not~~ analyzed, we can see that there are almost 193 UN states, only 21% of these states have female Prime Ministers. Conclusively, politics and policy-making is inherently male-dominated. While the decisions are made by men, resources are allocated to men and scarcely provided to women.

Despite all these problems faced by women in Pakistan and globally as well, there is still a ray of hope in the scenario. Policy-making is

getting influenced by feminist activists. There is a lot of awareness currently making its way to the public administration. All the waves of feminism and the movements were not in vain. They have rather created ways for support for women, 10% quota in public service, Child Marriage Ban Act 2025 etc. are examples of all such policies formulated to facilitate women. Policies are already made, strong execution is required which is possible by educating women on their rights.

Changes in cultural practices are ~~required to~~ important. In regard to religious clerics should play an active role in distinguishing between culture and religion. Re-interpretation of complex issues is required to understand the aspect of tolerance in Islam. People should be taught the Hadith of Holy Prophet: "Paradise lies beneath a mother's feet." Holy Prophet's love for his daughter, Hazrat Fatima needs to be a part of our social learning. This is the path which when followed will lead to a respectful community where women are not honour-killed for merely establishing a legitimate marriage with a man.

There are multiple rules already existing regarding employment of women. It is important to implement such policies, for example maternity leaves, disciplinary action against workplace harassment, equal pay for number of male and female employees etc. When women are cherished, respected and recognized in employment economy-related activities, we will rise a world full of female entrepreneurs, CEOs and leaders.

Research is already done regarding women participation in economy, rather it be formal or informal. This research should be integrated with policy-making and laws so that there is a practical manifestation of the solution found at research centres such as Allama Iqbal Open University, Quaid-e-Azam University, Fatima Jinnah Women University, etc. Local and international NGOs should be involved, discussions and debates should

be held at regular intervals to ensure everything is connected and integrated ~~see~~ seamlessly.

Once the theory and practice is ~~in~~ on one page, resources will be distributed more evenly. Healthcare, education and well-being of women will be top priority. When women will have power, ~~and~~ authority and influence, everything will be automatically sorted. Funds shall be allocated to ensure women are not just surviving but also thriving as any other member of society.

In the retrospect of all the ideas discussed previously, the status of gender equality is quite ~~weak~~ weak and problematic. However, there is no problem that exists without a solution. We need fathers who trust their daughters, mothers who empower ~~their~~ their fellow women and a society that sees beyond the gender identities. There is increasing awareness, rather it be small ^{increased} ~~increased~~. For the slip-hottest flame can undo darkness, and as day we will see the ~~right~~ daylight of our small efforts.