

Topic :-

Gender Inequality in Pakistan : Causes, Impacts and Solutions

A. Introduction

i- Individuals are born with inherent inalienable rights of life, liberty and property. (John Locke).

ii- Historical context of gender inequality in Pakistan

iii- Thesis statement.

B. Gender Inequality in Pakistan

C. Causes of Gender Disparity in Pakistan

i- Patriarchal structure of society;

a. "Man is the head of the home."

ii- Distorted interpretations of Islamic rulings;

a. Men are superior to women - a distorted interpretation of Islamic teachings.

b. Asma Barlas arguments in "Believing Women in Islam"

iii- Feudalism exploiting vulnerable groups;

a. Marginalization of women and transgenders in interior Sindh, Punjab and Baluchistan.

iv- Poverty generating a self-replicating cycle of gender

- inequality;
- a. Only 48% of girls gain education till primary and dropout rates increase in secondary level. (UNESCO)

D. Impacts of Gender Inequality in Pakistan

i- Economic deprivation of marginalized groups;

- a. Financial struggle of transgender community

- b. Only 22% female labor contribution in Pakistan. (ILO)

ii- Gender based violence;

- a. Qandeel Baloch murder

- b. Zainab Ansari case

iii- Societal backlash for feminist movements;

- a. Society's intolerance towards "Aurat March".

iv- Intersectionality;

- a. "Glass ceilings" in workplaces.

E. Solutions to Overcome the Issue of Gender Inequality in Pakistan

i- Promoting Education;

- a. Disseminating moderate and true Islamic teachings.

ii- Leveraging mass media;

Films like

- a. "Saving Face" by Sharmeen Obaid Chinoy

- b. "Orange is a New Black"

iii- Enactment of legal provisions in true sense;

- a. Transgender Persons Act (2018)
- b. Protection of Women Against Harassment at Workplace Act (2010)

iv- Running awareness campaigns;

- a. "Equal Pay for Equal Work"
- b. "#HeForShe"

F. Conclusion.

The Essay

"All individuals possess inherent inalienable right to life, liberty and property" says John Locke. Yet, not only a significant group is devoid of the very basic rights but also face societal backlash and violence if it speaks for its rights. Historically, women and transgenders in Pakistan have been marginalized in every walk of life. Deeply entrenched patriarchal norms, unrealistic expectations from women and persistent feudal system have shaped the society. Prepartition colonial legacies also have left impact, as in colonial period such vulnerable groups were exploited for labor. An amalgum of all the above mentioned causes came into existence that is seen in present Pakistani society

suffering from a malady of gender inequality. Pakistan is facing issues like financial debts, gender based violence and societal backlash against specific group but such problems can be resolved by strategic planning like quality education, leveraging mass media and enacting the legal provisions that already exist in the legal framework.

Pakistan, despite having constitutional and legal provisions for the protection of marginalized groups like women and transgenders, grapples with the issue of gender inequality. **Article 34** of constitution explicitly advocates for the disproportionate participation of women in politics yet their involvement remains limited. **Supreme Courts ruling in 2009** for the right of vote for the transgenders of Pakistan has not even made a significant difference. Despite having injunctions of Islam which command for fair and equitable treatment of all mankind, women face honor killings, transgender people face societal unacceptance and harassment. To cut a story short, gender disparity in Pakistani society persists in many ways.

which further leads a recurring vicious cycle of gender discrimination. Societal flaws occur everywhere, but only wise societies tame their flaws preventing themselves from grand catastrophe. Similarly, Pakistan can also fight against gender inequality through wise measures.

Beginning with the causes of gender inequality in Pakistan, patriarchal norms have been a major contributors to this overall societal distortion. Historically, men have been the only bread winners of the family while women have been confined to domestic roles. These imbalanced regulations led to confinement of women restricting their mobility and ultimately to the financial dependence over men. Overt or covert rulings at homes like "Man is the head of home" paved the way for women to act submissively in front of men. On the other hand, men began to lead a command over women - a legacy still followed in majority of the Pakistani society. Hence, one can say that deep rooted patriarchal norms are the major contributors of existing gender discrimination issue.

Furthermore, the Pakistani society majorly being a follower of Islamic injunctions, is misled by a few sects tacitly or intactly. The misinterpretation of Islamic teachings over a rulings on women have perpetuated the issue of gender inequality. Islam is a religion that advocates for the fair treatment of all mankind, be it man, women, a transgender or anyother person of society, but a few misled information prevalent in society gives rise to gender discrimination. Societal perceptions like "Men are superior to women" completely contradicts with the Islamic ethos which emphasize on equality, fairness and justice. Scholars like Asma Barlas in "Believing Women in Islam" argued that it is the societal distortion of facts which lead to gender based discrimination, not the Islam itself. Hence, a misguided information paves the way for major issues similar to the misled Islamic teachings giving rise to gender inequality.

Additionally, deep rooted feudalistic practices in various parts of Pakistan is also one of the

many causes of gender inequality in Pakistan. Feudal elites of Pakistan prevent the vulnerable groups to seek education in order to keep them ignorant and unaware. Resultantly, these groups which comprise mostly of women and sometimes transgenders, become subject to gender inequality. Such people are exploited for cheap labor, hence disadvantaging these vulnerable people. Such practices are widespread in areas of Sindh and Punjab and Sardar system in Balochistan fertilizing the grounds for gender discrimination. Therefore, the entrenched issue of gender inequality is also caused by the longstanding practice of feudalism in major areas of Pakistan.

Poverty, adding to above, is also another cause of gender inequality. Poverty is both a cause and a result of gender inequality. In societies where women and transgenders are deprived of financial independence because of so called societal norms, such nations tend to fall and struggle with economic hurdles. Women contribution in the workforce can

significantly boost a nation's GDP but countries like Pakistan, where women are restricted to domestic roles tend to struggle with poverty. Moreover, girls are deprived of education and boys of the family are prioritized to seek education in low income families. This practice further generates a cycle of poverty and gender discrimination. According to a report by UNESCO, only 48% of girls in rural areas gain education till primary and the dropout rates increase significantly at secondary level, perhaps due to early marriages, financial struggle, or social unacceptance. Therefore, poverty is the reason that blocks the way of opportunities for vulnerable groups and it is itself a cause of gender inequality as well.

Hence, there are many causes of gender discrimination in Pakistan which impact the society in multiple ways. Some of the impacts of gender inequality are discussed below.

Gender inequality impacts the economic conditions of the affected groups. Unrealistic norms

set by the society for such groups affect them by restricting their mobility, going against the financial independence of women, and discrimination on employment of transgenders. This marginalization in turns affect this group perpetuating a cycle of economic dependence on male parts of the house. The financial struggle of transgender community because of employment discrimination can be seen in Pakistani society. Additionally, economic marginalization of women can be analyzed from the ILO report which says that only 22% of females from rural areas contribute to the workforce. Therefore, gender inequality gives rise to economic marginalization of vulnerable groups.

Moreover, gender violence is another societal ill long practiced in Pakistan because of gender inequality. Sexual harassment, child marriages especially girls, and domestic abuse is widespread in Pakistan. According to a report by UNICEF, 21% of females in rural areas marry before the age of 18 and 1 in 3 women face sexual harassment in lifetime.

This is because such groups are fearful of raising voice for themselves due to the fear of social stigma and exclusion. Their silence on such critical issue exacerbates the malady of gender inequality causing a multiplier affect. The **Ganded Baloch murder** and **Zainab Ansari case** highlight the deep rooted structural flaws and societal indifference towards protection against violence of vulnerable groups. Hence, gender based violence (GBV) is also an impact of gender inequality in Pakistan.

Adding to above, when few educated or privileged women raise their voices for these vulnerable groups, they face societal backlash blaming them for being "too radical" or "anti-men". Though, feminist movements in Pakistan are on a limited scale, but the ones that exist are criticized for being overly westernized. This can be seen in the past few years where "**Aurat March**" is intolated by Pakistani society and even blaming it for being funded by foreign powers. Instead of reviewing the societal structure where

women and third gender are constantly subjected to economic, political and legislative marginalization, they face harsh reaction from other factions of society when they raise voices for their rights. Therefore, gender inequality practiced for past many decades has ingrained intolerance among other parts of society.

Also, intersectionality is also a major impact of gender inequality. The term coined by Kimberle' Crenshaw depicts the different aspects like race, gender, class, sexual orientation, disability and caste overlap and interact creating unique experience of oppression and or privilege. For women of Pakistan, intersectionality have always been an oppression. Transgenders and women have been constantly oppressed just for who they are. Economic marginalization, and sexual orientation further fertiled the grounds for oppressor groups. One of its results is the "glass ceiling" in workplaces where women and transgenders are facing invisible barriers like harassment, colleagues inappropriate remarks and unnecessary judgements. Hence, though intersectionality itself is

a form of gender inequality but it is also an impact of gender discrimination.

Above were few causes and impacts of gender inequality. In the following paragraphs, solutions to overcome the issue of gender discrimination is discussed.

The problem of gender inequality in Pakistan can be fought through quality education.

By promoting education among all men and women, and especially among transgenders, the issue can be overcome to a greater extent. According to a report by World Bank, every year of education added increases a person's earning potential to 15-20%. Hence by gaining education, not only financial benefits will be leveraged but also gender inequality be mitigated.

Because one of the major reason for inequality among genders in Pakistan is the distorted teachings of Islam, so promoting moderate and true Islamic teachings which advocate for the equality of all human beings would be helpful.

Furthermore, leveraging mass media to counter extremist

and radical ideas and promoting ethos of equality would be beneficial. In the era of technological advancement, when mobile phones and televisions are present in almost every household, making their best use for mitigating gender equality would be an advantageous step. Promoting films like "Saving Face" by Sharmeen Obaid Chinoy to address the women's challenges due to inequality would be helpful. Films like "Orange is a New Black" are beneficial to understand the struggles of transgender communities. Therefore, by making best use of mass media, gender inequality could be mitigated to a great extent.

Moreover, enactment on the legal and constitutional provisions in a true sense could be a great step. Unfortunately, despite having clear legal and constitutional provisions, Pakistani society is grappling with the issue of gender inequality. This is because of the deep rooted cultural norms and societal unacceptance to the new ideas. Change faces resistance but through persistence and perseverance, gender inequality

could be reduced. Implementing the laws, like Transgender Persons Act (2018) and Protection of Women Against Harassment at Workplace Act (2010), with true spirit aid in reducing the social ill of gender inequality. Hence, when the legal and constitutional provisions are enacted and reinforced by societies it will bring a considerable change.

Lastly, mobilizing awareness campaigns with the help of civil society can reduce the discrimination. Civil society actively mobilizes the cause and have greater access to vulnerable groups. Therefore, running awareness campaigns on rights and duties of every person would inculcate a sense of discipline, respect and tolerance towards other group. Global gender equality campaigns like "Equal Pay For Equal Work", "#HeForShe", "#Times Up" and "#MeToo Pakistan" have been successful in mobilizing large segments of society to raise for their rights, though faced criticism simultaneously. Therefore, engaging with civil societies and promoting awareness campaigns help

reduce the problem of gender discrimination.

In conclusion, Pakistan has been facing the issue of gender inequality and is still grappling with the problem. Deep lying patriarchal norms, entrenched societal unrealistic expectations and widespread poverty has enhanced the issue of gender inequality.

Despite having legal and constitutional provisions, the vulnerable groups continue to face the challenge.

Such malpractices impact the society in various ways. It marginalizes the vulnerable groups economically multiplying the effect. Also, it leads to gender based violence in many communities leading to social ills like honor killings, sexual assaulting and child marriages.

For every ill there is a remedy. Similarly, for the social ill of gender inequality, there are many solutions. Educating citizens could reduce the intensity of the issue.

Mobilizing civil society and leveraging mass media strategically would be helpful in lessening the issue. Every society has to face its monsters, but only the

wise society tames them strategically rather than perpetuate them by ignorance. Similarly, Pakistan can also fight against the monster of inequality by strategic planning and well policing. Pakistan's ratification of Convention on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and acts like Transgender Persons Act (2018) highlights its efforts towards making Pakistan an egalitarian country. By persistently struggling for gender equality, the time will come when Pakistan will be a global example of gender equality in the world map.

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