

Pakistan has Achieved Only Partial Success in Women Empowerment

Outline

1) Introduction

Despite the progress in legal reforms, political representation and enhanced appearance^{of women} in public spheres of life, Pakistan has achieved only partial success in women empowerment.

2) Women Empowerment in Pakistan:

2.1) Legislation and promotion of women empowerment

- a) ~~Hudood laws~~ Muslim Family Laws Ordinance
- b) Protection at Harrasment of women at workplace Act 2010
- c) Acid control and acid crime act
- d) Constitution of Pakistan.

2.2) Women Empowerment Through Political Participation

- a) Reserved seats in provincial and National Assemblies
- b) Case study: Benazir Bhutto

2.3) Enhanced Appearance^{of women} in Public spheres of life; an indicator of women empowerment

- a) Education: Ayla Majid's case
- b) Sports: ^{Cricketer, athletes} Sohail sisters' winning
- c) gold medals in south Africa and

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Kashmala Talat in shooting championship

c) Public service (case in reference: Nigar Johar and Sher sisters')

3) Women Empowerment in Pakistan is a Partial Success

3.1) Limited access to educational, ^{and financial} healthcare opportunities to women

3.2) Increased cases of gender based violence; a testament to poor ~~or~~ and inadequate women empowerment

3.3) Workplace discrimination; a strong indicator of ^{limited} women empowerment

3.4) Women empowerment in Pakistan is ^{also} hindered by financial interdependence of women

3.5) Partial success of women Lack of Awareness as the cause to inadequate women empowerment in Pakistan.

4) Suggestions to Enhance women Empowerment in Pakistan

a) Address root cause: The Patri-archal mindset

b) Increase awareness

5) Conclusion

" Current generation of women in Pakistan is doing much better than previous generations in terms of women empowerment, but we are still at snail's pace to fully realize it"

~ Maria Memon

Women are the asset of any nation, who play indispensable role in moral and economic progress of the nation. However, this role is dependent on the extent of empowerment granted to the women.

Empowering women is empowering society. Unfortunately, in this path to women empowerment progress of Pakistan is minimal. Despite the progress in legal reforms, political representation and enhanced appearance of women in public spheres of life, Pakistan has achieved only partial success in ^{women} ~~women~~ empowerment. Legislation like ^{Muslim Family Laws} ~~Ordinance~~ and Protection against harassment act along with increased presence of women in politics, education and sports are the testament to women empowerment in Pakistan. However, on the other side of coin, the ever increasing cases of gender based violence, discrimination at workplace and restricted access to opportunities are the demonstration of inadequate and limited women empowerment of the women in the

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country.

To begin with, the legislative reforms in Pakistan, ever since its inception, have been aiming to enhance women empowerment in the country. First of all, the introduction of Muslim Family Laws Ordinance by Ayub Khan, empowered women by regulating various aspects of family laws including marriage, divorce and inheritance. The provisions of Muslim Family Laws Ordinance, as documentation of marriage, consent of first wife for second marriage and assurance of inheritance shares, mark the initial practical step towards women empowerment. Secondly, the constitution of Pakistan also provides various fundamental freedoms to the women, guaranteeing them empowerment. The constitution provides all the fundamental rights equally to both men and women. The articles of the constitution given women the rights to social and economic justice, protection against discrimination at workplace along with equality ^{before law} and the right to own a property. Along with constitution, various acts have been introduced aiming to protect and empower women of the country. The introduction of Workplace Harassment Protection Act (2010), further empowered the women,

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by ensuring a legal framework for addressing workplace harassment, making workplaces safer and under legal check. Furthermore, Acid control and Acid crime Prevention Act (2011) is also a landmark in empowering and protecting women. Thus, Considering the legislative framework of the country, it guarantee empowerment of women in almost every sphere of life.

Continuing further, the women empowerment in Pakistan has also been promoted via strengthening their political participation and representation. Article 51 of the constitution reserves seats for women in national and provincial Assemblies. 60 seats are reserved for women in national assembly only.

By reserving seats, state guarantee political presence of Pakistan amidst the patriarchal social structure of the state. These constitutional provisions and protections are the reason behind Benazir Bhutto being the first female Prime Minister among the muslim world. From provincial assemblies to national assemblies and important ministries, women are playing various roles at political fronts. This women presence of women in politics is also fueling factor behind increasing ratio of female voter turn out during elections. Thus, this enhanced

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political presence of women in the country is ^{also} the practical demonstration of women empowerment.

In the same way, the presence of women in various spheres of public life, from education to sports and public services, is also the potential indicator of women empowerment in Pakistan. Starting with education, which is the fundamental right of ^{every} women ^{of Pakistan}, women are doing wonders in the field of education. From degree distinctions to international appearances, women of Pakistan are second to none. The living examples of this claim are Ayesha Farooq and Ayla Majid, being ^{the} first female fighter pilot ^{of Pakistan} and first female president of ACCA from South Asia respectively. Moreover, along with education, women empowerment ⁱⁿ of Pakistan is also manifested through their impressive presence ^{of women} in sports ~~too~~. From cricket team captains to shooting stars and weightlifting champions, women of Pakistan are leaving no stone unturned in the field of sports. Female Cricket team captains like Sana Fatima, Sana Mir and Nida Dar are the testaments to women empowerment in Pakistan, with their leading ^{and capabilities} performances. The staggering performance of Kashmala Talat in shooting championship and powerful showdown of Sohail

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Sisters in Commonwealth Powerlifting Championship ^{is} ~~marks~~ another benchmark demonstrating women empowerment in Pakistan. Moving further, the success of women empowerment in the country is also manifested by dominant appearance presence of women in the field of public service. From military to police, administration and inspection, women are inclusive part of every sphere of public service. The infamous example of five Sher sisters, all of them serving effectively in various fields of public service. Then to quote, is the three star general Nigar Johar, who have effectively supervised and headed regional and local branches of military hospitals even during the tough times of terrorism insurgency. ^{Hence,} this much inclusive participation of women in public spheres of life is the affirmation to the success of women empowerment in Pakistan.

Despite of inclusive and enhanced participation of women, at various fronts of private and public life, complementing women empowerment; it is also important to take into account the other side of the coin. Where on one side, there has been ever increasing and dominant demonstration of women empowerment,

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there exist increasing cases of gender based violence, gender discrimination, restriction of opportunity access, financial interdependence and lack of awareness of rights, on the other hand. These existing issues make the success of women empowerment in Pakistan a partial one.

The very first hurdle in the success of women empowerment is the limited access of women to educational, healthcare and financial opportunities. The girls initially are denied to right of education granted to them by the state of Pakistan. This ~~limited~~ denial to education is backed by factors such as poverty, ~~p~~security ^{concerns} and patriarchal nature of society. As According to the report by world bank, 25% of population of Pakistan is below poverty line; amidst such financial strains and ~~dominance of~~ patriarchal mindset, boys education is usually proffered over the education of girls. The manifestation of this discrimination ~~is~~ in education is verified by the fact that out of 23 million out of school children, 13 million or more are girls. Stating further, even if given the right of education, most families, especially in the remote areas, allow only primary education to the girls. Moving further, women in various areas of the country are ^{also} denied the opportunity to healthcare services.

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In Pakistan, with the population growth rate of 2%, women of remote areas lack access to timely and proper healthcare; which is the reason for the existence of the highest maternal mortality rates in the South Asia. In addition to this, women are also restricted to financial opportunities, with many university graduates ending up wasting potential by sitting homes. They are not empowered to decide to work and earn, their decisions are made usually by male heads of the family either father, brother or husband. Therefore, this limited and restricted access to opportunities is the premier hurdle in the success of women empowerment in Pakistan.

Secondly, the women empowerment is also demonstrated by increasing cases of gender based violence. Women don't have control on their decisions and choices; this lack of autonomy combined with patriarchal mindset, sets the stage for gender based violence. Honour killing is the extreme form of gender based violence and it exists dominantly in Pakistan. Along with honour killing, the vices like domestic violence, rape and psychological violence are also no less in existence. Despite the presence of strict laws and regulations against

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gender based violence, ~~the cases~~ ^{ever ~~incre~~} increasing cases of violence against women restricts the path to women empowerment.

Thirdly, workplace discrimination also indicates inadequate women empowerment in the country. By using their constitutional rights and filling reserved seats, women do get opportunities to work in diverse fields from politics to business and education, marking an initial success towards women empowerment. However, this success is only initial and ^{presence of} discriminatory treatment at workplace makes this success as partial one. In workplace, the first dilemma of discrimination that women face is of wage disparity. Secondly, the existence of phenomenon of glass ceiling is a hurdle to optimize women empowerment. Women are not promoted to high executive and decision making posts, as ^{and their} ~~their~~ decisions are judged based on the gender and not their capabilities. The broader testament to this lies in the fact that there are quite a number of women in the parliament ~~but~~ yet none in the current cabinet. Moreover, verbal and physical harassment is also existing in place. Women are verbally abused, even, the ones with strong political careers,

based on the type of clothes they wear and the way they carry themselves. This workplace discrimination and harassment is backed by strong patriarchal values of the society, considering women inferior and not entitled to empowerment.

Fourthly, the hurdle in the wake of women empowerment is the financial interdependence of women. Financial independence is the major force empowering women to ~~and~~ take decisions for themselves and have control of their lives. Financial independence is the essential yet missing component to the women empowerment in Pakistan. Financial properties of women are usually owned by their husbands in the name of joint ownership and better protection of the property. Likewise, mostly working women don't have access to their ^{own} accounts and their credit cards ~~of~~ are owned either by in-laws or by husbands; a phenomenon highlighted by a ^{private} school principle. Thus, the absence of this essential component to women empowerment also contributes to ~~the~~ reducing the success of women empowerment in Pakistan.

Last but not least of the delimitations contributing to the reduced success of women empowerment, is the

lack of awareness on the behalf of women, about their rights and freedoms. Living in a patriarchal society and having limited access to information, women, especially of remote areas, don't even know what their fundamental and legal rights are. Likewise, with years of exposure to overpowered patriarchal society, ills like domestic violence and denial to the right of education are justified by women themselves. The principle of "obedient wife is good wife" is used to justify domestic violence. Thus, this lack of information ^{and awareness} serves to perpetuate gender inequality and ^{limits} ~~reverses~~ women empowerment at the grass root level.

The existence of loopholes in promoting women empowerment despite of having extensive legal framework to support it, is the point of concern. With the existing patriarchal mindset ^{in society} and lack of awareness of it among women about their legal rights, the realization of women empowerment is a utopic dream. Thus, strong governance ^{structure} combined with increased awareness programs aiming to promote women empowerment are the need of the time.

In a nutshell, Pakistan has made a significant progress towards women

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empowering women, but this progress is still a partial one with various loopholes in the process. Where on one side, women empowerment is extensively promoted by framing legislations and increasing appearance of women in variety of fields and services; it is dominantly hindered by inbuilt restrictions and inequalities along with discrimination in the society against women, on the other side. ^{However,} To have a success of women empowerment there is a need of collective national effort.