

## **The Devastating Truth of Pashtun Women in Tribal Areas of Balochistan:**

By

<sup>1</sup>Zareen Yousaf, <sup>2</sup>Abdul Qadir Bareach

### **Abstract:**

*The main purpose of this present research work is to discover the status, and to highlight the hidden problem faced by women in Pashtun society of Balochistan. This question of women's status has acquired great importance throughout the world and among all the communities not only among Pashtun's. For thousand years' women were kept in total subjugation in all the societies and they were inferior to men and must submit to men's authority for the smooth running of family life.*

*The status of women has been changed after the preaching of Prophet Mohammed and due to the change in the tradition of past. God created men and women to build life together. It is Islam which opened the door to women to wade through all fields of struggle in life side by side with men. But in Pashtun society men are very religious minded but due to tribal tradition created imbalance and inequality of gender role due to tribal traditions men exercise unlimited powers over women. But in the urban areas the position of Pashtun women is a bit change.*

*However, this study found that compared to rural tribal areas of Balochistan these traditions are vanishing and are not rigidly practiced in urban areas like Quetta city.*

**Keywords:** Badal, Compensation, Islamic rights of women, Inheritance, Pashtun tribes of Balochistan, Pashtunwali, Status of Pashtun women.

### **Introduction:**

Pashtun are Muslim and adhere to Pashtunwali codes. Pashtun cultures is mostly based on Pashtunwali. Pashtun lives in according to Pashtunwali. Pashtunwali is so essential to the identity of the Pashtun

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<sup>1</sup>M.Phil. Scholar Department of Political Science University of Balochistan Quetta Pakistan

<sup>2</sup>Professor Dr. Abdul Qadir Bareach Dean Research/Chairman Department of Political Science University of Balochistan Quetta Pakistan

that there is no distinction between practicing Pashtunwali and being Pashtun. “Pashtunwali the ways of Pashtun”. It is Pashtun identity.

Men and women in Pashtun society inhabit separate position where they live. The lives of Pashtun women vary from those who reside in conservative rural areas. Such as tribal belt of Balochistan as Chaman, Zhob, Lorelai, Pishin, to those found in urban centre. Though many women remain tribal and illiterate. (“I have a right too” BBC World Services 16. Jan. 2006). Pashtun women these days vary from traditional house wives to urban workers. But due to numerous social hurdles the literacy rate remains considerably lower for females than for males. Traditionally men begin influencing a girl life at an early age exercising authority on issues ranging from education and marriage. After marriage a women’s husband and in-laws take full control of her life. So Pashtun woman is always expected to live according to the cultural values and tribal code. The men in Pashtun society are very religious but in practice they follow social norms and tribal codes. The life of Pashtun women is full of hardships unconditional obedience and cultural norms. There is great influence of men and right of women are determined by male. Women are identified the name of her father and later by her husband. In rural areas still their position is not good and they do not even have their religious rights e.g. right of choice in the selection of husband in marriages are totally arranged, forced marriages, marriage of very young girl with mismatch old man because of high walwar offered and paid to her parents no matter whether he is suitable for her or not she is pushed to marry against her will because the family wishes. Even widows in tribes like Khilji’s are forced to marry a relative of deceased husband

### **Background:**

Pashtun who is famous because of his bravery and hospitality is by nature religious extremist. He is very religious but in practice live according to Pashtunwali. Pashtunwali is so essential to the identity of the Pashtun there is no distinction between practicing “Pashtunwali and being Pashtun”. There is no contradiction between being Pashtun and being practicing Pashtunwali. It is in fact Pashtun’s identity. By adhering Pashtunwali a Pashtun possess honour in his tribe and society. Pashtun men’s identity is independent on the strict adherence to cultural norms and tribal affiliation. Deprivation of rights is not due to religion resistance but by religion itself infused with Pashtunwali. (“Pashtun are forced to revert to Pashtunwali in order to be recognized as member of society” Ahmed, A.S 1980 Pukhtun economy and society London Roulledge).

### **Women Status:**

A woman's character and action reflects the status and honour of her family. Nang, namus, ghairat and several correlative words in Pashtu for honour. Such traditions and norms literally man made constitute an extreme form of society and a distinct contrast between male and female status. A Pashtun woman is expected to live according to social norms, culture values and tribal code, walwar and women in compensation is also part of these prevailing tribal code still in some tribal families. "Dispute settlement and their philosophies have resemblance across the globe although traditional approaches vary from culture to culture". Most Pashtun women felt victims to this practice in Pashtun society. This practice is culture endorsement despite of no feelings of honour rather gathering ashamed of it. According to human rights using girls, women as a commodity and paying it for resolution of a conflict is notorious form of violence. I personally know a Nasar family who were from Afghanistan but because of feud on woman's honour has to leave their native town in Afghanistan and firstly part of family took shelter in Peshawar and part of family came to Quetta in 1980. The cause of their shelter and refuge was that a tribal young boy of another family forcefully snatched the dupata of a young girl and taking off dupata means that man claim's that the girl who's dupata he has is his and no other man can marry her. Due to this act of young man the girl's tribe for the sake of their honour killed him and later on migrated from Afghanistan along with their whole entire family members firstly to Peshawar and then take entire family members to Peshawar and then after a year half of the family come to Quetta and resided here. But the victim of the family whose boy was murdered keep on searching girl's family. After many years this young girl was married to her first cousin even there was a great age difference between the two. At the time of marriage, she was thirty years old and her husband was fifteen. The boy she was married to was a lot younger than her but the elders of her family arranged this marriage. The feud which was committed by her tribe for the sake of her honour that feud was resolved after her kids were born and it was decided by the Jirga member that girls' tribe according to customary compensation will give three girls to the boy's family who was murdered by her family member in Afghanistan. Her own daughter was also included in those three girls who were handed over to the family of the boy who was killed in Afghanistan as a compensation to make them happy and for lasting peace. It depends on the other tribe how to treat these girls but these girls were very kindly treated by the victim's family and after year or two they also allowed these girls to visit their families and they were really happy and satisfied. However, she customary practice become very cruel when small girls become subject to it. According to this above tradition when someone kills a member of

another tribe or family accidentally or by planning. The elders of that area form a Jirga to mediate the dispute and end the enmity. The Jirga members decides normally to force the young woman or girl from killer's family to marry a man from the victim's family without her consent to settle the dispute between two hostile clans or families. Pashtun women of rural areas in Balochistan are still compelled to sacrifice for their father's and brother's crime that they haven't committed so as to resolve hostilities. The woman who get married by this tradition don't have any right. Even in some cases they are not allowed to see their own families ever.

### **Right of Inheritance:**

As for inheritance even according to Muslim history a woman was treated like a commodity. She had a no right to inherit from either her husband's or father's property. Instead she herself was an object of inheritance. Inheritance was not meant for women it was for the man only. (Tafsir al Tabari op.cit. VII Pg. 599). During the prophet's time Ans bin Thabit died leaving behind two daughters and a small son. Ans' cousins after his death took away his entire property as neither wife nor daughters or son could inherit it. Ans' wife went to the prophet Mohammed pleading her inability to feed her children as the entire property belonging to her husband had been taken away by his cousins. At that time this Quranic verse was revealed:

*“For men is a share of what the parents and near relative leave, whether it be little or much an appointed share”. (The Quran 4:7).*

Another verse of Quran on inheritance states:

*“Allah enjoins you concerning your children: for males is equal the portion of two females; but if there are more than two females, two thirds of what the deceased leaves are theirs, and if there be one, for her is the half. And as for their parent for each of them is the sixth of what he leaves, your parents and your children you know not which of them is nearer to you in benefit. This is an ordinance from Allah. Allah is surely ever knowing wise”. (The Quran 4:11).*

The Quran removed all the uncertainties and fixed a share in inheritance for women.

Pashtun as a strict follower of Islam and being a Muslim do not give right of inheritance to its women. The women in Pashtun society is deprived of this right even today because it's against their customs. Traditions do not permit Pashtun women to claim or demand right of

inheritance land is divided only among males only on the basis of equality. The elder brother is generally given extra share. Despite Islamic injunctions neither wives, nor daughters inherit property. The women according to Islam gain property but the right to inherit is impacted by tribal customs and tradition in Pashtun society even today women often believe themselves not to be part of the either their birth family or their spouse's family and thus mentally does not believe themselves entitled to the right of property from either. Women's inheritance right in Pashtun are beset with both legal and cultural obstacle gaining inheritance rights for women requires social and cultural changes. This type of change taking place in some urban residing tribes of Quetta city like Kasi's. Their married women with the support of their husbands are now forcefully taking their property share. It is a kind of sin among Pashtun tribe a woman herself demanding property. Such women have no respect in her maternal family and boycott afterwards from her brothers.

As inheritance of property involves cultural practice, so changes in inheritance behaviour requires cultural change. Customary law dominates Pashtun society. Those refuse the application of customary law will be condemned by their families and have no real choice to refuse its application. I myself belong to a Pashtun Kakar tribe. My entire family is educated and well aware of Islamic principles and rights.

### **Conclusions:**

Thus for centuries it was natural that women were inferior to men in all societies and tribes of the world. Thus the male dominated societies often harnessed even just and equal norms laid down for women to perpetuate their hold. Pashtun men are one of those who want their hold on women. Today many old social cultural structures are crumbling and new social orders liberal are taking its place due to this new social structure position status are changing and due to these changes it is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain the old attitude towards women even in Pashtun tribes. As we have seen and have found through studies that Pashtun women were considered inferior and deprived of their basic rights and always remained on the mercy of males.

Unfortunately, life formulated on such traditions and thus many rules reflects the cultural prejudices of Pashtun rather than the greatness of the Quran. The Quran has been very fair to the cause of women. However, cultural prejudices in Pashtun tribes in rural areas have played a vital role in denying them right for status. We being Pashtun should not be constrained by what are ancestors thought and did. To be constrained is the Quranic way of approaching the truth. The Quran mentioned that the Arabs used to bury their daughters alive. This was the barbaric custom of burying female. However, the prophet Mohammed said:

*“The one to whom a daughter is born and who does not bury her alive, does not humiliate her will be sent to paradise”.*

Due to this preaching of Mohammed a great improvement occurred in the status of women. The Quran considers both the sexes as having originated from one living being and hence they enjoy the same status. One has no superiority over the other. The Quran says:

*“Men are maintainers of women as Allah has made some to excel others and they spend out their wealth on women”.*

Thus from this verse it becomes clear that the excellence, superiority which Allah has given one or the other is not sexual superiority or excellence. It is due to social functions that were performed by the two sexes. Since man earns and spent his wealth on women he acquires functional superiority over women. So, Pashtun being Muslim acquires functional superiority over women. But he has much lessened her status as a source of feud compensation and by depriving her of religious right of inheritance and placed her in secondary position. According to Quran and Islam she has independent role to play and well defined rights. She does not exist at the pleasure of her male adjuncts. But unfortunately, after change in world tradition people give more importance to certain traditions than to the clear statement of Quran.

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