

Status of Women in Pakistan: Role of the State, Islam and Culture

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Abstract

The paper examines the status of women in Pakistan in light of their economic, social and political roles in the society. To present a composite view of women's status various indicators of Gender Development (GD) and Gender Empowerment (GEM) have been looked into (UNDP, 1995). While GD defines women's position on basic human development measures such as, education, health and employment the GEM reflects gender disparities in political participation and decision making positions.

State, Islam and culture are often represented as the major forces to determine the status of women in Pakistan. An attempt has been made to explain the current status of Pakistani women in light of the legal framework provided by the State, Islamic values and cultural realities of Pakistan. The paper suggests for a concerted effort on the part of the Government to widen gender development and gender empowerment opportunities in order to enhance the current status of Pakistani women.

Status of Women in Pakistan: Role of the State, Islam and Cultural

Introduction

The term status of women is defined in literature in two different ways. Some researchers view status of women in terms of their access to resources such as education, health services, employment and positions of authority (Shah, 1986; Oppong, 1980). Others focus on women's place in the social structure, their ability to exercise rights regarding their marriage, education, work and participation in public life (Youssef, 1980; Zia, 1980; Rahman, 1980). Combining these two approaches, the term "status of women" refers here to their economic, social and political roles in society.

To examine the status of Pakistani women, their education and health profile, access to economic opportunities, and the extent of their political participation are discussed. A number of indicators in these four areas have been looked upon. However, to present a composite picture of the status of women in Pakistan, two specific indices, Gender-related Development Index (GDI) and Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) have been used (UNDP, 1995). While the GDI adjusts the measure of average human development concerning education, health and employment, to take account of gender disparities, the GEM reflects gender disparities in political participation. State, culture and Islam are represented as the three major forces that shape the role, status, and destiny of women in Pakistan. While a cursory look at the institutional, cultural and religious norms of Pakistani society suggests state, culture, and Islam as mutually reinforcing forces determining socio-economic status of women, a careful

analysis of socio-cultural and religious prescriptions and realities find them at odd with each other.

Pakistan is constitutionally an Islamic state where 97 percent of the population is Muslim. The 1973 constitution declares Islam as the state religion and ensure that all existing laws shall be brought in conformity with the Injunctions of Islam laid down in the Holy Quran and Sunnah and no law shall be enacted which is repugnant to such Islamic Injunctions (Mahmood, 1994). On the other hand, while living with Hindus in the sub-continent of India before the partition of British India, Pakistan inherited many cultural traditions. These traditions still largely persist in Pakistan and influence the role and status of Pakistani women. However, the extent to which state, Islam, and culture may be held responsible for the current status of women greatly depends upon one's individual perspective. There are some (secular) who view Islam as the regressive force in the country which is the main reason for backwardness of women (Haq, 1997; Saeed, 1994; Qutb, 1994) while others hold cultural attitudes that discriminate against females responsible for it (Shah, 1986, Government of Pakistan, 1995). To some the state being extension of patriarchy reflects cultural biases against women's advancement (Weiss, 1994). Without being caught up by a single point of view, an attempt has been made to determine first the status of women and then examine the extent to which state, Islam, and culture influence the status of women in Pakistan.

Women and Education

Access to education is universally accepted as key to the enhancement of status of women in society (Jalil, 1993; Lockheed, et al. 1991). Unfortunately, the majority of

Pakistani women are deprived of this essential component of gender development. Although educational indicators do not present a bright picture about men, women however, suffer the worst in terms of educational deprivation in Pakistan. The situation is more extreme in rural areas and in some regions. Women's education profile based on three indicators: 1) adult literacy rate¹; 2) Combined enrollment ratio in educational institutions; and 3) mean years of schooling is presented below. While examining the overall gender profile in education, an effort is made to highlight regional disparities wherever data permits.

Adult Literacy

About two-third of Pakistan's total adult population and 77 per cent of its women are illiterate. According to the latest survey conducted by the Pakistan Census Organization (PCO) the overall adult literacy rate in 1991-92 was 39.9 per cent. Although the overall literacy rate is low, the situation is even worse in rural areas. While the adult literacy rate in urban areas is 60.5 per cent it is 30.3 per cent in rural areas, almost 50 per cent lower than that of urban areas (FBS 1995).

Comparison of the overall literacy rates of women and men reveals glaring gender disparities in general and in rural areas in particular. Overall, the literacy rate for men is 52.8 per cent and for women it is 26.3 per cent. While the literacy rate for men in urban areas is 70 per cent, for women it is 50.3 per cent. In rural areas, literacy rate is 44.6 per cent for men and 15.3 per cent for women. These figures clearly indicate that women lag behind men in literacy both in

¹ Using the 1972 UNESCO's definition of literacy adult literate is a person who is 15+ years old and can read and write a short statement in everyday life with understanding in any language.

urban and rural areas. However, gender gap is much wider in rural areas.

Besides the rural urban divide in literacy rates there are widespread regional disparities which make the situation even worse. The adult literacy rate ranges from 17 per cent in rural Balochistan to 50 per cent in urban Punjab², and 52 per cent in urban Sind (FBS, 1995, Haq 1997).

Enrollment in Educational Institutions

Overall combined enrollment ratio in educational institutions for both sexes is quite low. According to the Education and Youth Survey 1991-92 the enrollment ratio by age is provided in the following table:

Enrollment Ratio by Age and Sex
Table 1

Age	Total	Women	Men
05-09	55.31	43.91	65.82
10-14	62.61	47.79	75.24
15-19	35.97	22.71	46.29
20-24	9.99	4.30	13.30

Source: EYS, Federal Bureau of Statistics, 1991-92

Table 1 indicates that overall enrollment ratio for both women and men is lower for higher age groups and female enrollment ratio is even lower for all age groups as compared to men. The rural-urban disparities make the situation even worse. While the enrollment ratio for rural area vis-à-vis urban is low, a gender comparison within urban and rural areas highlight glaring gender disparities in the enrollment ratio of both urban and rural women as exhibited by Table 2.

² The figure for Urban Punjab is taken from the second source as the first source does not contain female literacy rate for the Punjab

Enrollment Ratio by Area and Sex

Table 2

Age	Urban Area		Rural Area	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
05-09	69.26	75.88	34.11	61.86
10-14	75.05	82.40	33.58	54.74
15-19	43.71	56.60	11.41	40.49
20-24	12.29	21.59	1.50	8.54

Source: EYS, Federal Bureau of Statistics, 1991-92

While enrollment by age and sex provides a good overview of gender disparities, it does not provide information about the female-male representation at different levels of educational institutions. Table 1 displays male and female enrollment differences at three levels of education primary, secondary, and tertiary.

Estimated Enrollment by Sex 1994-95

Table 3

Level	Male(%)	Female(%)
Primary	69	31
Secondary*	63	37
Tertiary		
Colleges	58	42
Prof. Colleges	75	25
Universities	87	12

*secondary includes high schools and vocational institutions.

Source: FBS, Government of Pakistan, 1995

Table 3 indicates shocking gender disparities in enrollment at all three levels especially in professional colleges and universities.

Mean Years of Schooling

Mean years of schooling is another indicator of gender development. It has been well documented that boys spent more years in school than girls in South Asian countries including Pakistan (World Bank, 1995). According to the Human Development Report 1997, mean years of schooling for female in Pakistan is 0.7 which is lower than some of the South Asian and several Muslim countries such as Malaysia, Morocco, and Tunisia (Haq;1997, p:25)

Women and Health

Good health is one of the universally accepted determinants of socio-economic status of individuals in a society. It enhances human potential and capacity for participation in gainful economic activities. Unfortunately, the overall picture about the health status of people of Pakistan is not very encouraging; life expectancy is 58 years; about half of the population does not have access to basic health services, and one-fourth of new born babies are under weight and malnourished. Women's situation further deteriorates because of biological and cultural factors i.e., early marriage and resistance to family planning. A women's health profile is presented here by using four health indicators of gender development, i) life expectancy ii) mortality rate iii) fertility rate, and iv) use of contraceptive measures.

While overall life expectancy in Pakistan is 62 years, it is 63.5 years for women and 62.5 years for men. Maternal mortality rate for the year 1993 was 340 per 100,000 live births. Total fertility rate for the year 1995 was estimated as 5.6 children per woman. While comparing rural and urban areas, the fertility rate among rural women is higher than

urban women. For example, an estimated fertility rate for the year 1995 was 4.7 children for urban women and 6.1 children for rural women. Based on the available figures it is not difficult to say that Pakistani women have a very low health status overall and women in rural areas lag behind urban women on the above indicators of gender development because of extremely low adult literacy and poor access to health services. Table 2 exhibits health profile of Pakistani women on the above indicators of health development.

Health Profile of Pakistani Women
Table 4

Health Indicators	All Areas	Urban	Rural
Life expectancy	62.5	-	-
Maternal mortality rate- Per 100,000 live births	340	-	-
Total fertility rate	5.6	4.5	6.1
Women using contraception	12.0	15.1	7.0

Source: 1) Planning and Development Division, 1995
2) Human Development in South Asia, 1997.
3) Pakistan Demographic Survey, 1995.
4) UNICEF, Government of Pakistan, 1992.

Women and Employment

The level and kind of women's participation in gainful employment is an important indicator of the economic status of women in a society. In Pakistan, women lag behind men not only on overall employment participation level but also in terms of their representation in important occupations. This section reviews statistics in these areas to explore the economic status of Pakistani women.

Labour Force Participation

The overall labour force and employment participation rate in Pakistan, as estimated on the basis of the existing population of 135.28 million is 27.46 per cent with a total labour force of 37.15 million for the year (Government of Pakistan, 1996-97). According to the latest available labour force survey 1993-94, the overall labour force participation rate is 27.88 per cent, for male it is 45.74 per cent and for women it is 8.86 per cent (LFS, 1993-94).

Differences in labour force participation rates however, exist in rural and urban areas. In rural areas, the participation rate is higher than the urban areas as agriculture is more of a family occupation than mere work. Women's participation rate in both urban and rural areas is lower than men. For instance, in urban areas, the male participation rate is 45.6 per cent and the female participation rate is 8.4 per cent. Whereas, in rural areas, the participants rate is 46.3 per cent for males and 8.66 per cent for females (Government of Pakistan 1996-97).

Employment Status

Employment status in Pakistan is officially defined in terms of four categories: employer, self-employed, unpaid family helper, and employee (FBS, 1995). Women differ from men on all these components of employment status. Table 3 points to the disparities in employment status of the employed labour force both in urban and rural areas.

The table shows that overall, 57.2 per cent of employed women fall into the unpaid family helper category as compared to 22.2 per cent men. On the contrary, 42.4 per cent of men and 16.4 per cent of women are self-employed. While 34.2 per cent of men are employees 26.3 per cent of women have employees status. Only 1.2 per cent of men and 0.1 percent of women are employers.

Distribution of Employed Persons by
Employment Status (1991-92)

Table 5

	<u>Total</u>	<u>Women</u>	<u>Men</u>
All Areas			
Employer	1.2	0.1	1.3
Self-employed	42.4	16.4	46.8
Unpaid Family Helper	22.2	57.2	16.4
Employee	34.2	26.3	25.5
Urban Area			
Employer	2.9	0.4	3.1
Self-employed	32.6	15.8	34.2
Unpaid Family Helper	9.2	18.6	8.3
Employee	55.3	65.2	54.4
Rural Area			
Employer	0.5	0.1	0.6
Self-employed	46.2	16.6	52.1
Unpaid Family Helper	27.2	64.8	19.7
Employee	26.1	18.5	27.6

It can be concluded from the above statistics that: 1) the majority of women are unpaid family helpers in rural areas in contrast to urban areas where the majority of women are employees. This sharp contrast between urban and rural women's employment status is obvious as agriculture is a family run activity where rural women work as unpaid family helpers and other employment opportunities are almost non-existent as it is the case in

urban areas; 2) the majority of rural men, on the other hand, are self-employed as compared to majority of the urban men who are employees; 3) the number of women and men who have employer status is small in both rural and urban areas but in case of women it is profoundly low.

Occupational Representation

Most of the official reports and labour force surveys classify employed persons by occupation as professionals, administrative and managerial workers, clerical and related workers, sales workers, service workers, agriculture worker, and production workers. Based on the data compiled by the Ministry of Manpower and Overseas Pakistanis, percentages of males and females in seven occupational categories have been computed for the year 1991 and produced in the table 6.

Distribution of Employed Persons by
Major Occupational Groups (1991).

Table 6

	<u>Women</u>	<u>Men</u>
Major Occupations		
Professional and related	20.4	79.4
Administrative and related	15.2	84.7
Clerical and related	18.9	81.1
Sales and workers	3.9	96.5
Service workers	16.9	83.1
Agriculture and related	2.9	97.1
Production and related	3.8	96.2

Source: Pakistan/Netherlands Project on Human Resources,
Ministry of Manpower and Overseas Pakistan, 1991

Women in all occupations are under-represented as compared to men. Based on the figures provided in the table more representation of women in professional and technical jobs as compared to other professions is linked with

women's enrollment patterns in professional colleges. More women enroll in medical, home economics, and education as compared to engineering, commerce, law, and agriculture. An element of "gender streaming" or sex-segregation by field of study is reflected from choices of women for professional education as medical and teaching professions are valued and considered suitable for women.

Women and Politics

Access to political power is an important indicator of the gender empowerment considered necessary for the enhancement of women's status in society. The role of Pakistani women in politics is extremely limited as compared to men despite the fact that Pakistan is the first Muslim country to have elected a women prime minister twice. The representation of women in the National Parliament and cabinet is extremely low. For instance in 1994, out of 217 seats of National Assembly, only 4 were women³. Similarly, there were only 2 women in the Senate out of 87 members. In the same year, there was only one woman minister out of 22 cabinet ministers and one woman out three special assistants to the Primes Minister. The gender disparities in political representation are extreme in a country where women constitute almost half of the population. Pakistan stands lowest in terms of gender representation in politics among South Asian countries.

³ Until 1988 there were 20 special seats reserved for women in the National Assembly which constituted over 8 per cent of the total seats. Currently there are no such special seats for women. Women groups and liberal political parties are striving to get these seats restored again. The present government has promised to restore these, but have not yet acceded to it.

Women, the State, Islam & Culture: Women and the State

The section below discusses the role of state, religion-Islam and culture in according women their current status in Pakistan. The state being the most powerful social institution influence the status and position of women in society. The legal rights and opportunities provided to women by the State's constitution, laws, and policies that govern social, economic, and political life have far reaching impact on the status and position of women vis-à-vis men in the country. A review of the Constitution of Pakistan, employment laws, and public policies and initiatives in education, health, and employment is presented to determine the extent to which the State of Pakistan is sensitive to and how it has responded to gender issues and disparities over time, and also to identify the areas that require state action to enhance the status of women in society.

The 1973 Constitution of Pakistan guarantees equal status to women and safeguards their rights. Article 25 of the Constitution provides that "all citizens are equal before law and are entitled to equal protection of law and there shall be no discrimination on the basis of sex alone. Article 27 of the Constitution protects women from discrimination in appointments in the Civil Services by stating that "No citizen otherwise qualified for appointment in the services of Pakistan shall be discriminated against on the basis of race, religion, caste or sex". Article 34 indicates the state's commitment to ensure the full participation of women in all spheres of national life and provides that "steps shall be taken to ensure full participation of women in all spheres of national life (Dogar, 1996; Mehmood, 1994; Khosa, 1992). Besides these constitutional provisions. The Muslim Family Laws Ordinance 1961 provides protection for women's rights regarding inheritance, marriage, polygamy, divorce,

maintenance of wife and children, and payment of dowry and is of a great importance to women.

However, despite constitutional guarantee of women's rights and commitments to equal opportunities for women, public policies in education, health and employment remained gender blind during the first two decades of the existence of Pakistan. Women's development remained disguised in the government's overall efforts to economic growth and development. It was for the first time in the late 1970's, when government began addressing clearly and in an institutional way the issues of gender development. The Government of Pakistan established a full-fledged Women's Division in 1979 as the national machinery for the advancement of women.

In later year, women's development became an integral part of the development planning. Form the Sixth Five Year Plan (1983-88) a separate chapter was devoted to the development of women outlining the forms of discrimination in various areas including education, health, employment and putting forward aims for their improvement.

Education

As a result of increasing gender sensitivity in development planning, the 1992 Education Policy under Social Action Program⁴, for the first time, included women's education as one of its main objectives. In order to achieve

⁴ The Social Action Program (SAP) was launched in 1992-93 to accelerate integrated development of social sector. Basic education, including primary education, functional literacy, and female education, form the largest component of the SAP. This program is still in operation and provides a frame work for social development in Pakistan.

its objectives, policies focused on opening new primary schools, upgrading the existing primary schools to elementary level, increasing the ratio of female teachers to 50% by hiring female teachers for primary schools. It also emphasized the need for diversifying the curriculum at secondary level and raising the quality of education through in-service teacher's training programs. The policy set specific targets in each area along with the budget requirements.

The philosophy outlined in the 1992 Education Policy provided the basis for women's education in the Seventh (1988-93) and Eighth Five Year (1995-98). Education Policy 1992-2002 stressed the need for raising female literacy level from 23% to 40% by the end of the period. With regards to tertiary education the policy remained silent on the proportion of female and male colleges to be opened by the year 2002. Since college education is gender-separated, it is important to identify the number of degree colleges to be opened for women to enhance their literacy level.

In addition to increase in degree colleges, the 1992 Education Policy also planned hundred per cent increase in the enrollment of university education by opening four universities in the public sector and sixteen universities in the private sector. Since universities have co-education the new universities will certainly enhance opportunities of higher education of women.

To what extent the 1992 Education Policy will reduce gender disparities and improve educational status of women depends on how effectively the policy is implemented. Based on past experiences where many of the public policies have failed due to shortages of funds, poor coordination of federal and provincial bodies, lack of proper motivational campaigns, and misappropriation of available funds by

public officials, a high level of commitment and sincerity of the task is required to make the policy a real success. The success of the policy also depends on how the society responds to the opportunities offered by the state in the wake of the 1992 Education Policy.

Health

Overall, the government of Pakistan has failed to address the health needs of the vast majority of the population specially in rural areas due to inadequate health policies and programs. However, women are the worst sufferers of poor and limited health facilities in Pakistan and face higher risk: 1) due to social and cultural factors that affect their mobility and hence their access to basic and reproductive health care which is mostly available at distant locations, and 2) inattention to the special needs pertaining to their reproductive role.

Prior to 1992, health policies intended to offer broad-based health care system remained largely unimplemented, as a result Pakistan had failed to extend the basic health care system to the rural areas. The focus in the policy remained on tertiary health sector restricted to urban areas only. Consequently, the majority of women, especially in rural areas had limited access to basic health care facilities. Moreover, women's reproductive health was largely ignored because of failure to integrate family planning with the health care system. The family planning services remained limited particularly in rural areas. Even where services existed they were of poor a quality and failed to encourage or motivate women to adopt family planning as means of enhancing their reproductive health which is the main reason for low contraceptive prevalence rate in Pakistan (Khan, 1996).

Nevertheless, in recent years, there has been some significant development in addressing women's health care needs including reproductive health. The Social Action Program (SAP) initiated in 1992, emphasized the need for social sector development to catch up with all other development initiatives. SAP has particularly singled out improved and increased primary health care within the overall health sector, and population planning as one of its broad aims. The other initiatives include the Village-Based Family Planning Workers (VBFPW) Program launched in 1992 and the Prime Minister's National Health and Family Planning Program (PMNHFP) started in 1994. In addition to these programs the Ministry of Health is also starting to provide family services along with the primary health care through its Basic Health Units and rural health centres.

Efforts are also underway to suitably alter the medical curriculum to incorporate training in family planning counseling and services. The government is also financing public health campaign particularly on radio and television regarding reproductive roles, child feeding, hygiene and family planning. Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) are also actively promoting female health and family planning. However, despite these government's initiatives, Pakistan has a long way to go to improve the health status of women as it has yet to evolve a broad-based and effective primary health care system. The current initiatives are *ad hoc* and reach only to a small proportion of population.

Employment

Since the creation of the Women's Division in 1979 Women's employment has received considerable attention at government level. However, so far government

interventions focused only on the supply side of female employment. Various steps taken by the government mainly concentrated 1) enhancement of women's potential by expanding training facilities in the form of more polytechnics and vocational training centres, and diversifying training skills including secretariat work, computer training, and community work; 2) facilitating women to avail employment opportunities through the provision of support services including, transport, hostels, and day care centres, and 3) providing credit facilities to facilitate women to start up their own businesses.

For instance, in 1989, the First Women's Bank was established to extend outreach credit facilities exclusively to women. The bank which, in 1995, had 32 branches throughout the country is controlled, managed, and entirely staffed by women. The bank has considerably improved credit availability for women. However, urban middle class women benefited largely from the facilities provided by the bank. While women with low income in urban areas also availed the credit facilities to some extent, women in rural areas due to constrained mobility remained out of the bank's reach.

Besides government initiatives NGO's with the help of government and foreign donors are also playing considerable role in enhancing women's capacity for engagement in gainful economic activities through provision of training, education, and credit facilities. However, the services provided by NGOs are also restricted to urban areas despite the fact that the government, in the Eighth Five Year Plan, has clearly recognized the need for sensitizing and encouraging the NGOs to expand their activities to rural areas.

As far as the demand side of female employment is concerned, the government has not yet made significant progress in this direction except introduction of 5 per cent quota for women in the public sector appointments. The Government does however, recognize the existence of employers' prejudices and biases and employment laws that discriminate against women in the formal employment sector. For example, the Eighth Five Year Plan (1993-98) clearly spells out problems of gender discrimination in employment and suggests an affirmative approach to deal with it:

The participation of women in employment is low and lags far behind men. Special efforts will be made to improve their education, skill, and employability. This includes,(c) reservation of special quota in public sector jobs, (d) creation of congenial atmosphere in offices and factories for women and (e) removal of sex bias in employment (8th FYP, p:133).

Affirmative action approach will be adopted to protect women's rights of inheritance, ownership of property, access to education, employment and credit facilities etc. The legal structure will be reviewed with a view to weed out all discriminatory laws and practices. To fill the key positions involved with the formulation, implementation and monitoring of the women development programs, preference will be given to women candidates (8th FYP, p:134).

The Government of Pakistan reiterated its commitment to addressing gender discrimination in employment in a much more elaborated way in its report submitted to Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995.

A recent report 1997 prepared by the Government of Pakistan's Commission on Status of Women is a significant advance towards the above objectives. The commission after a through review of the existing labour and service laws has identified discriminatory provisions and made necessary recommendations to combat gender discrimination.

However, to implement the Commission's recommendations effectively an integrated effort is required on the part of all government bodies involved to enforce strict legislation for establishing standards.

Political Participation

Pakistan is a signatory to the Convention on the Political Rights of Women. Women have the right to vote, contest for membership of all elected bodies, and hold all public offices at par with men. Even in the past some affirmative action measures in the form of special seats for women have been taken to encourage women in the political process. However, constitutional provision for 10 per cent of the national and 5 per cent of provincial legislative seats for women lapsed as it was for certain specific period. As long as the constitution provided for special women seats, women's participation in national and provincial elections was quite noticeable. However, after the enabling provision lapsed in 1988, women's representation in National and Provincial Assemblies has sharply declined.

Besides this, no effective measures have been taken to mainstream women into the political process. Women's membership in political parties continues to lag behind men's, and women are rarely represented at policy making levels of political parties.

Women and Islam

Women and Islam is a widely discussed and debated subject within and outside Islamic countries. It has been approached at different levels and with different orientations. There is a general impression that Islam accords a low status to women vis-à-vis men and treat them differently which is the main reason for backwardness of women in Muslim societies (Haq, 1996; Qutb, 1994; Saeed, 1994). The practice of veil/purdha, sex segregation, and the reproductive role of women in Islam are widely perceived as barriers to women's access to opportunities for gender development and participation in socio-economic and political activities. Thus, an effort is made here to determine the extent to which the aforementioned elements restrict women's access to education, employment, health care particularly reproductive health and political power by reviewing Islamic prescriptions and practices in Pakistan.

Islam teaches a doctrine of equality and justice between women and men. God, the almighty, (SWT) has made men and women equal in their religious, ethical, and civil rights, duties, and responsibilities. The Quran establishes religious equality between the two sexes in the following verses:

Whether, male or female, whoever in faith does a good deed for the sake of Allah will be granted a good life and

rewarded in proportion to the best of what they used to do (16:97)⁵

Their lord responded to them that He will never permit any of their good deeds to be lost, whether done by males or females. They proceed one from another (3:195).

On civil equality of women and men, the Quran says:

To men is allotted what they earn, and to women what they earn.....(4:32)

However, there are a few exceptions that pertain to the functions of motherhood and fatherhood. While motherhood includes home-care and child bearing and caring, fatherhood consists of home protection, livelihood-earning and overall responsibility. These two roles call for a different physical, psychic, and emotional constitution as necessary for self-fulfillment of both sexes. This role differentiation is neither discrimination nor segregation (Al-Faruqi, 1992).

In addition to laying down the general principle of equality between women and men, the Quran and the Sunnah also provides guidance on the issues relevant to gender development such as education, employment, reproductive health, and political participation that suggests "Allah (SWT) did not intend the Muslim woman to isolate herself from society behind the veil or within the walls of a harem" (al Faruqi, 1992, p:135)

⁵ The translation of all Quranic verses referred in the chapter is form English translation of Quran by Abdullah Youaf Ali (1989)

The Quran and Hadith⁶, the main sources of teaching of Islam, stressed the importance of knowledge not only for a particular class or sex but as an essential need for every Muslim, women and men. The importance of general education was the subject of the very first revelation of the Quran:

Recite in the name of your Lord, the creator.....Recite, for the Lord who is most gracious. He taught the art of writing. He taught a human what he never knew before (Quran, 16:15).

Islam made it obligatory for every Muslim to acquire knowledge to understand the true spirit of Islam and emphasized being well-versed in different branches of knowledge to distinguish between the lawful and the unlawful, between the good and the bad. The Qur'an describes the true Muslim who always prays to God by reciting:

My Lord: Increase me in knowledge (Quran, 20:114).

Islam impressed equally upon women and men to achieve perfection through acquisition of knowledge. Several provisions of the Ahadith⁷ shed light on the importance of seeking knowledge for women for example, the Prophet once said, "The acquisition of knowledge is the duty of every Muslim man and woman". "Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave". Thus, it is absolutely clear that Islam does not discriminate against women in term of rights pertaining to education. With regards to the question of female employment, Islam again does not bar women from seeking

⁶ Hadith is a saying or tradition of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

⁷ Ahadith is plural of Hadith which means sayings or traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

employment and careers and participating in any gainful economic activity. Several Quranic verses and examples from the life of Prophet clearly support the idea of Muslim women working to earn their livelihood as the Quran says:

There is a guaranteed share for those who seek and endeavor (41:10).

In another verse the Quran says:

And be not like a women who breaks into untwisted strands. The yarn she has spun after it has become strong (16:92).

Several examples from the days of the Prophet also indicate that Muslim women worked outside whenever it was needed. Women tend to lead families due to desertion, divorce and death of husband. For example, the Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) wife Khadija who was a widow earned her living by trade before her marriage with the Prophet. Thus, Islam does not forbid women to go out and work in such institutions as required their services such as, education, nursing, and medical treatment of women. Similarly, women are not denied to participate in state affairs and public dealings.

Islamic history also points that women attended mosques alongside men, they perform the Pilgrimage along with men and participated in the warfare although, special arrangements were made for them when required. For instance, the Prophet's wives, especially Hazrat Aishah taught women as well as men and many of the Prophet's companions learnt the Quran, hadith and Islamic studies from her (Maududi, 1996). Therefore, exclusion of women from development activities including education, employment and public participation based on religious orthodoxy would be a mere misinterpretation and

misunderstanding of Islam. Thus, Islam by its original teachings did not pose threat to women's advancement.

With regards to women's reproductive role with special reference to family planning, the Quran neither clearly prohibits nor approves it. However, the Islamic scholars draw inferences from certain Ahidh and rudimentary form of contraception practiced by companions of the Prophet and suggest that there is no prohibition in Islam against family planning. "It is left to the practical wisdom of the individual concerned or of the community to regulate their behavior as they choose with due regard for the objectives and need of the Muslim community" (Ishaque, cited in Commission of Inquiry for women, 1997, p:174).

It is evident from Quranic Injunctions that Islam accords Muslim women a status equal to men. However, the way Islamic decrees are interpreted and practiced in the Muslim countries have far reaching impact on the status of women. While a great majority of the Muslim countries state that Islam is the state's religion, there are very few, for example, Saudi Arabia, who enforced Islamic laws strictly. Otherwise, may variations exist within the Muslim countries in terms of implementation and practices of Islamic Shariah. While Pakistan is also an Islamic country and the Constitution of Pakistan declares Islam as the state's religion, an analysis of Pakistan in terms of implementation and practices of Islamic Shariah reveals that the way Islam has so far been interpreted, understood and practiced is almost at variance with the actual teachings of Islam. In practice, many customs, traditions and rituals that have been accepted as Islamic govern most of the personal and social matters including observance of Purdah and reproductive affairs rather than true Islamic Injunctions (Malik, 1997).

Pakistan's position on both issues Purdah/veil and fertility control seems paradoxical when compared to some of the other Muslim countries. While religious leaders take extreme position on these issues, the government and the people specially the urban middle class, are generally more pragmatic. The tension between religious forces and state institutions is one of the factors for failure of the state to resolve issues like family planning, purdah etc. In contrast in the countries like Indonesia, Malaysia, the religious leaders adopt relatively soft approach on these issues and get along well with the government policies. Therefore, neither purdah nor fertility control is an issue there. They have been more successful in Islamic decree of veil and family planning programs with the need and compulsions of the changing realities of modern world.

Women and Culture

Although the constitution of Pakistan and Islamic teachings guarantee equal treatment to women in society concerning their participation in developmental and economic opportunities, social realities bring a completely different and mostly negative images of women. Pakistani women are subject to discriminatory customs, traditions, and social practices deeply rooted in the culture that are neither Islamic in spirit nor in conformity with the ideals of the state outlined in the Constitution. The origin of these customs and traditions can be traced back to the history of the subcontinent. The areas now included in Pakistan was part of the Indian subcontinent before the partition of British India in 1947. Living with Hindus for year together traditions, attitudes and beliefs of local inhabitant about women were deeply influenced. For instance a women is described by a multitude of derogatory attributes in the

Hindu religion. With regard to her appropriate roles the Hindu religion states; "in her childhood a women must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, and when her lord is dead to her son; she must never be independent. Furthermore, the widow's expectation of immolation on the deceased husband's pyre (sati)⁸ as an extreme expression of the notion that women's worth is nil without her husband (Government of India, 1974, p:40-41). Although women's status has gone through a great deal of change in India by improving such negative images about women. Some of the negative images about the role and status of women continued to define the role and status of Muslim women and their influence can still be perceived in present day Pakistan.

The attitude towards women as an inferior being is visible from the way in which the birth of a baby girl is received. It is greeted with guilt or despair on the part of the mother, shame or anger on the part of the father, and the general feelings of sympathy towards the parents among the entire circle of friends and family. These feelings are more intense if the baby girl is the first child in the family. On the other hand, the birth of a male child is an occasion of rejoicing and celebrations.

Pakistani culture has a very clear role demarcation of women and men in everyday life. The most appropriate roles considered for women are to be mothers and house wives. Girls from an early age are trained to possess the domestic and child rearing skills to cope with their basic roles of house-wives and mothers. Marriage is considered the ultimate goal in a young women's life. However, a

⁸ Sati refers to a Hindu tradition according to which widow used to burn herself alive with the dead body of her husband.

young woman do not have any say in this important decision of her life. Parents are the sole decision makers regarding the marriage of their daughters. Paradoxically, the burden of making the marriage successful lies solely on the daughter who is advised by her parents that her husband's house is the ultimate place for her which she should not leave until her death. Thus, a young woman after marriage is under a constant pressure to make the marriage a success at any cost as divorce is a stigma for the woman and her parents which makes the chances of her remarriage almost nil.

A women's worth is judged by her power of reproduction. Marriage without children has serious consequences for marital relationship, and it is often the wife/women who is blamed in case of infertility. Therefore, having a child in the early years of marriage is considered vital for marital bonds.

The perception of women as burden and liability and an overemphasis on their reproductive roles in Pakistani culture has serious consequences for gender development as it restricts women's access and participation in education. Parents have very modest goals about their daughters' education. In many tradition bounded families, education of a female child suffers at the cost of a male child specially when resources are short (FBS, 1995). Even in cases where female children get this opportunity, their education ends with their marriage which is preferred at an early age.

All media forms such as text books, newspapers, magazines and television project a stereotyped role of women as well as negative images of educated and employed women, who are portrayed as deviant of the social traditional norms (Government of Pakistan, 1995;

Pervaiz, 1982; Anwar, 1982). While a married working woman is constantly made conscious of the neglect of her prime responsibilities as a wife and mother, a single working woman is criticized for her unacceptable marital status. The only acceptable professions considered for women are teaching and medicine which is visible from women's choice of the field of study in professional colleges and universities (Hafeez, 1995).

Women's health continues to suffer and deteriorate because of their resistance to fertility control (i.e. child spacing and numbering). Women's avoidance to adopt birth control measures is not a matter of their own choice rather it has its basis in the cultural norms where a male child is preferred over a female child. Women's lack of authority in decision making about their reproductive health, immobility, and their hesitation of discussing their ailments even with doctors are some of the cultural reasons that have direct bearing on women's health.

Women's lack of power to choose their occupation including politics and their immobility further undermine their prospects for coming on at par with men in politics. The women who overcome these cultural barriers and participate in politics are generally stigmatized as more liberal.

The above review of the position of women in Pakistani society fairly describes an average Pakistani women, but without mentioning the class, regional and provincial differences in women's life it would tantamount to overgeneralizations. In the less populated provinces of Balochistan and Northern Western Frontier Province, tribal culture is more prominent. The tribal women face more stringent rules of conduct and behavior.

In the more populated and feudal provinces of Punjab and Sind, women relatively are more visible. In agro-based villages, women work on fields side by side with men, and seen collecting fuel, water, and even on the construction sites. Strict observance of purdah specially veil is not very common in these areas.

The urban areas scattered throughout the country offer completely different social and material environment. These urban centres represent a blend of traditional and modern life which created a new matrix of socially acceptable behavior including gender relations. These are the areas where change in gender relations is more prominent at all levels education, employment, politics, and attitudes towards reproductive roles of women. Women are seen in all walks of life i.e., medicine, teaching, universities, civil services, business politics. Women are conscious of their health and tend to have less children. Veil is increasingly becoming less a norm but more an exception in these urban centres.

Finally, the economic class a woman belong to makes a significant difference in her life. A woman of upper economic class whether in urban or rural, tribal or non tribal areas is relatively less vulnerable to social and cultural restrictions than a woman who come from other economic classes.

Conclusion

To conclude, women in Pakistan lag behind men on all indicators of human development including education, employment, health and political power. These indicators

make for a dismal reading when a comparison is made on urban-rural basis. While analyzing the role of the state, Islam, and culture in gender disparities, it has been observed that the inferior position and negative image of women is deep-rooted in Pakistani culture and is the root cause of low socio-economic status of Pakistani women. The culture has such a strong hold on people's perception of women's role that even state sponsored gender development initiatives and the egalitarian spirit of Islam are quite often ignored. However, attitudes towards women and perceptions of their role in society are changing in the cities where women have relatively greater access to education, health, and employment opportunities. The increasing cost of living in the wake of changing life styles have made people more pragmatic towards the role of women; more and more women are shattering the traditional barriers and are increasingly seen in all walks of life. However, for an even gender development in the entire country, the government has to make a concerted effort to widen human development and economic opportunities in order to reach women in all areas and regions.

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