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Women's Empowerment in Pakistan: Dissection of Paradoxical Depth

By Sarwat Rauf¹

Abstract

This article analyzes the status of women in Pakistan as well as the effectiveness of new legislation on women's empowerment in Pakistan. I examine the impact of governmental efforts to empower women on social practices in Pakistan. The concept of women's empowerment is becoming popular horizontally, but vertically, actual empowerment is hindered because of the glass-ceiling and social taboos; hence, a lot of sincere and strenuous efforts are required to change the prevailing mindset. To support gender equality, Pakistan, like other states, encourages women's participation in social, political and economic spheres. However, the success of a few female role models tends to obscure the obstacles faced by the majority of women workers. This article underscores that Pakistan has introduced positive amendments to its constitution in order to reinforce women's positions in different sectors during the last two decades, but that several anomalies are attached to women's involvement in social, political and security sectors. The legal policies of Pakistan are built on universalistic assumptions aiming to uplift women's status. However, the domestic situation is different in its presuppositions and hampers the implementation of the law. This paper raises the question of why longstanding governmental efforts have not achieved the goal of women's empowerment? In researching this paper, a close societal level observation was made. Afterwards, books, official documents, websites, articles and opinions were examined to support an objective and real analysis. The intended purpose of this paper is to analyze the barriers to the implementation of laws favouring women's empowerment. Additionally, this paper presents policy recommendations for ensuring vertical empowerment and development of leadership skills for women in Pakistan.

Keywords: Women's Empowerment, Glass-Ceiling, Opportunities, Pakistan, UN, Rights, Society

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Introduction

In order to ensure women's empowerment, scholars study the social positions of men and women as expressions of two different classes. Although several states have reiterated their commitments to provide equitable economic and political opportunities to women, others have been unable to attain the goal of equality between men and women. Gender disparity is an archaic and pervasive form of inequality in Pakistan. According to the 2017 census of Pakistan, Women in Pakistan constitute 49% of the total population (Population, Labor Force and Employment 2018, 179), but they are underrepresented in the economic sphere.

Due to uneven socio-economic development, the status of Pakistan's women differs between rich and poor classes and, to some extent, between rural and urban communities (Sheikh, Meraj, and Sadaqat, 2016). Most women face discrimination due to the patriarchal society of Pakistan, but responsible institutions seem to minimize this fact by citing the successes of a few influential women or by referring to progressive laws in response to the violation of women's rights.

Ostensibly, the constitution of Pakistan grants equality to women and men by maintaining that there will be no discrimination on the basis of gender (Equality of Citizens, 2012). Along with the laws of equality, rhetoric about the security and empowerment of women has also been a part political discourse and is used to portray women as enjoying equal positions in all sphere of life. However, this rhetoric amounts to little more than pretence and fabrication and correspondingly, several scholars are of the view that the legislation is merely a piece of paper that has no real impact on the lives of women (Muneer, 2018). In actuality, the political, social and economic situation of women in Pakistan is as grim as it is in other states due to pervasive conventional thinking and patriarchal societies.

Widespread research on women's economic status shows that among rich and poor people, mostly women are poor (Gupta, 2017; see also "Why the majority of the world's poor are women," n.d.). They are either low paid, unpaid or employed in part-time, low-status, precarious jobs (Butterwick and Jubas, 2010).² A similar situation prevails in the field of politics, as females hardly get a chance at political participation and representation. The literature on politics and women indicates that the election of women to political positions has served a symbolic purpose rather than establishing gender equality (Iwanaga, 2007). Moreover, biased legal institutions and cultural traditions can impede women's ability to achieve equal status (Eastin & Prakash, 2013). As in some other states, women in Pakistan are also less likely to own land (Anjum et al., 2018, 268) and there is a very low level of legal support for justice available to females. Furthermore, women in the workplace are often restricted to low-level clerical positions that echo institutionalized gender biases (Eastin and Prakash, 2013).

Given the great number of women in Pakistan, it is a conundrum why women cannot obtain top managerial positions in education, politics, security and economics. While discussing gender inequality in Pakistan, Salman asserted that despite women constituting half of the population of Pakistan, their potential is not utilized for national development (Salman, 2016). This is largely due to issues such as their lack of education, naivete about politics and rigid social norms that obstruct women's participation. However, it is certain that the democratic system cannot flourish in any society with just half of the population represented whilst the other half is downgraded. Political activities are public matters, but women are mostly not allowed to

² Traditional monetary measures of poverty are not perfect to determine gender discrimination because these were not applied to individuals but just took households for data purpose. Hence, all household members were grouped as either rich or poor.

participate, because they are considered to be personal belongings of their families and sometimes, it is even difficult for them to cast their own votes. Indeed, some families believe that honorable women do not participate in politics, as their responsibility is to look after their household matters. Essentially, these restrictions not only hamper the personal and professional development of women but also hinder Pakistan's economic, political and ideological growth.

Despite the basic realities mentioned above, the rhetoric of women's empowerment has been used by every political party of Pakistan even while most of them have done little to advance the legal rights of women. Of course, there has always been a handful of ladies who fought for the rights of women. History shows that in order to protect women's rights, female activists stood up against the repressive laws made during Ziaul Haq's administration (Imran and Munir, 2018, 130; see also Kirmani, 2000). Later, President Pervez Musharraf worked for women's emancipation and opened many fields to female participation. Moreover, to bring women into the mainstream political and economic system, several amendments were made to old laws, but the implementation of these amended laws has remained in limbo in most places.

Against this backdrop, the current study is built around two questions. First, why are women in Pakistan unable to get strategic, high-ranking positions in the workplace? Second, have new laws and institutional reforms addressing women's empowerment in Pakistan decreased the gender gap in political and economic activities? This paper maps out various factors that influence women's representation in different fields of work in Pakistan. It also assesses the reasons for the meagre participation of women in economic activities by providing a theoretical framework that helps explain unfavourable circumstances that affect women.

Conceptual Framework

The historical, political and social frameworks of feminism are ever-changing and the problems feminists address during each era arise from particular moments in world history. Male-dominated knowledge production has largely excluded women from the process of formal theorizing and knowledge-building. Although some writers claim that women are powerful and enjoy equal rights with men, other scholars that work on reconstructing philosophical tenets have noted two fundamental areas of deep concern. First, historically women have been segregated from knowledge acquisition and application in the scholarly, political and economic spheres. Second, there are few recognized women philosophers and those that have achieved some recognition are regarded as insignificant (Pettersen, 2017). Indeed, traditionally, there has been a negative characterization of women by renowned philosophers (Feminist History of Philosophy, 2015). For example, Aristotle is commonly regarded as a misogynist, because he described the relation of male to female as a natural relation of superior to inferior and ruler to ruled (Borghini, 2019). This indicates a systemic alienation of women, which runs a lot deeper than one might think. Notwithstanding gradual transformations in the education sector due to women's participation in higher education, most women today still cannot interact openly in the public sphere, as they face harassment by their male peers.

With the passage of time and the development of human consciousness, narratives and debates about women's rights surfaced in academic colloquiums. In the mid 19th century, a regular campaign for women's rights began. Elizabeth Cady Stanton started the move towards emancipation and recognition in July of 1848 in New York (Eisenberg and Ruthsdotter, 1998). Gradually, it has been realized in America and other regions of the world that women's participation in governmental affairs is indispensable for the democratic system. Today, many governmental and non-governmental organizations worldwide are addressing the challenging

task of empowering women in every sphere of life through awareness campaigns and progressive legislation. Notwithstanding substantial legal advances towards gender equality in Pakistan, gaps between men and women have been widening and making the sincerity of these efforts dubious. Hence, it is imperative to fathom the basic realities impeding women's empowerment in Pakistan.

Overall, the social, political and economic landscape in Pakistan shows a tough tale for female workers and politicians. To be sure, several illustrious political activists brought their sisters, wives and daughters into politics to paint a deceptive picture of Pakistan's polity. To understand this matter, internal, external, vertical and horizontal descriptions of women's progress or lack thereof are elemental. The wider literature on women's empowerment has suggested that various factors are curbing the progress of women. Some writers stress the patriarchal context as a causal factor, while others employ a multi-factor analysis to explain hindrances to women's empowerment, which is based either on observations or different research methods. However, new perspectives are being used to deconstruct traditional bases of knowledge and build new ones. Closer examination of the evidence suggests a number of problems with explanations linked to deprivation and grievances. The application of frameworks based on popular grievances encounters a problem of generalization that conflates rich and influential females with women from poor and underrepresented classes. Despite these conflicts, feminist theorizing and women's perspectives have challenged mainstream elaboration.

Glass Ceiling and Women's Empowerment

Many latent barriers to the advancement of women that bar them from reaching the top levels of the workplace are invisible. The absence of women's authority in the workplace not only drags on the economy but also curbs the national progress of Pakistan. Obviously, women need to capitalize on their talents and skills so that they can be more productive for the development of their families, society and country. Their skills could be employed for economic gains by eliminating the inequalities that prevail in society. Since most of the barriers to women's emancipation are invisible, the problem can be best understood through the lens of glass ceiling theory.

The "glass ceiling" is a concept used to characterize gender inequality, or racial inequality, which is even more unjust and larger than other types of inequality (Cotter, *et al*, 2001). Glass ceiling theory critically examines the invisible obstacles that prevent women from acquiring influential positions in the workplace and politics. Importantly, one should note that women's empowerment does not mean women dominating the other gender but rather, women rising above historically embedded discrimination against women. Great philosophers presented politics as a male prerogative because women were regarded as physically and mentally unfit for it.

It would not be wrong to say that the problem of the glass ceiling is growing without any overt discrimination against women. It is deceptive that one cannot see that certain job advertisement or hiring practices are preferential for men. Similarly, no explicit barriers impede women's professional growth, so to all appearances nothing prevents them from securing influential positions. Most organizations claim that they are equal opportunity employers and that they do not prohibit women from applying. However, on the sly, women encounter challenges like harassment, doubts about their abilities, and the expectation that they should dress in a sexually appealing manner. These and other hidden obstacles make it difficult to analyze the obstructions women face in society and the workplace.

When examining the notion of the glass ceiling in Pakistan, prevalent discrimination against women comes the fore, which anyone can easily sense but that is difficult to find in the newspapers. Despite the recent increase of women's entry into high paying professions such as medicine, teaching, law, banking and information technology, unfavorable conditions are still perceptible. For example, women's enrollment in higher education in Pakistan remains relatively lower than men's. Indeed, a study conducted in 2010 has provided evidence that there are very few women continuing higher education (Malik and Courtney, 2010). A number of barriers, including socio-cultural attitudes and poverty, have influenced girls's entry into higher education for many years (Chowdhury, 1996). Moreover, many women either lack the required experience or cannot remain in their positions long enough to advance because of their family commitments. Therefore, a paradox emerges insofar as it is not direct gender discrimination that prevents women from getting influential positions but that their unique social positions prevent them from matching the competency of men (Kaur, 2017). These exclusionary behaviors (and also the inflexible schedules of most jobs) are colossal hurdles that prevent women from being considered efficient workers.

To be sure, there are a handful of women who have broken the glass ceiling and reached high-ranking positions. Certainly, alongside the many instances of the under-representation of women there are instances of women rising to top positions. These exceptions only reinforce the glass ceiling effect, because the example of a few successful females prevents the recognition of a number of women who could not confront the same challenges because of unsupportive families or overriding fears. The number of underrepresented women is much greater than the number of those holding high ranks (Global Gender Gap Report, 2021, 14).

Many women serve in universities, but they hardly ever secure the position of vice-chancellors, who are mostly men. Similarly, women participate in political affairs, but only one female politician got a chance to represent Pakistan as the head of government in its entire history. The example of Ms. Benazir Bhutto is used to demonstrate women's empowerment, because she overcame all challenges and became not the only prime minister of Pakistan but also a prominent woman in the Islamic world (Khan and Naqvi, 2020, 289). It is also noted that the parliament of Pakistan has a large number of females in comparison to other South Asian countries. Nonetheless, it is not very common for women in Pakistan to walk the streets alone and they are restricted in choosing their professions, because they must check the social acceptability of their presence in that particular job. In the first few years of Pakistan's founding, most women activists focussed on social welfare in the country, because that kind of work was socially accepted and was not at odds with the cultural milieu. For these reasons, predominantly women remained involved with the rehabilitation of refugees (Saigol, 2019). Today, women seemingly perform well in media. Many of them work in state-owned media such as radio and television, but the percentage of women is significantly lower than the percentage of men in the position of Director-General of media houses.

Women's empowerment might be assumed by looking at their position in parliament. Women in Pakistan's parliaments hold 20% seats (in national parliaments in Pakistan from 2009 to 2018, and 2020). However, women represent half of the population. The elections of 2018 enacted the Election Act of 2017, which made it compulsory for all political parties to grant 5 % of tickets to female candidates and most of the political parties obeyed this rule. Moreover, women's votes constitute less than 10% of the overall polled votes in any constituency (Zafar, 2018). The percentage of women's representation in parliament is still not satisfactory. The absence of equity is observable in all organizations and no rules or laws for women produce a

healthy environment. For example, family formation has a huge impact on women's lives insofar as they cannot fulfil the required labor for most positions most of the time.

The glass ceiling impacts the status of women and also imposes a decaying economy on Pakistan. Naturally, if half of the population is not participating in economic affairs, it becomes a burden on the remaining half. In this regard, the research statistics of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) concludes "economic empowerment of women is key to growth" and could advance the GDP of Pakistan by 30% (Salman, 2016). The current deficit is largely because females are prevented from taking crucial part in economic and political decision making.

Situational Facets of Women's Empowerment

Across all South Asian societies, gender stereotypes are pervasive and social norms hinder females' performance and progress (Gender Equality, n.d.). The social milieu of Pakistan is largely male-dominated and men and women are considered discrete parts of the world. Patriarchal tenets are rooted in local customs of Pakistan and determine the social value of gender ("Women in Pakistan," 2000). Ostensibly, women of Pakistan work in all spheres, but oftentimes their minds accept the domination of men. Likewise, socially embedded obstacles limit their performance and influence their accomplishments. In urban areas, where females often have a public life, women cannot get appropriate positions due to the specialized job requirements, and even if some women satisfy these requirements, many are still deprived of key positions wherein they are not receiving but giving orders. As far as politics is concerned, most political parties do not offer women seats equivalent to men's. Furthermore, women in rural areas face systematic and persistent barriers to the full enjoyment of their human rights and social restrictions starkly impact their lives, because they are not allowed to leave their homes for education or jobs ("Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women," 2016).

Conventional thinking about the emancipation of women focuses on women obtaining adequate levels of education. Women's problems in the workplace and inability to obtain leadership roles are neglected phenomena. As a matter of fact, it is difficult for women to get advanced jobs and if they do, it is difficult for them to succeed within those jobs due to social taboos. More often they are viewed as inferior to men because of their supposed biological weakness. Women's participation in economic activities is often limited because of family obligations or because they lack an education appropriate to available jobs. A study prepared by Thomas Reuters Foundation (2018) has included Pakistan in the list of unsafe states for women and also referred to prior reports and maintained that "Pakistan was named as the fourth worst nation when it came to economic resources and discrimination in the workplace" ("World's most Dangerous Countries for Women," 2018). Many women could not get training required for access to the highest ranks in the job force, but also the scarce number of females in the highest positions is due to the lack of strong family support.

Here it becomes essential to unfold the legal aspects of Pakistan's system for women. Certainly, the constitution of Pakistan allows women to fully participate in politics (Latif, *et al*, 2015), but conceptually men and women are divided due to uneven levels of socioeconomic development. Older legislation was in place to support women, but it had little impact due to social practice. Interestingly, a thirteen-member committee was set up in 1976 in Pakistan for the protection of women's rights. The main purpose was to introduce legal reforms to improve the social, economic and legal conditions of Pakistani women (Aftab, 2008). This contradiction

between theory and practice creates confusion in understanding whether women are empowered in Pakistan or not.

Apparently, in the political sphere, Pakistan has offered more rights to females, as there are 60 reserved seats for females in the National Assembly, but presently there are 69 women in seats. This trend would lead one to believe that the status of women is on a winning streak. Similarly, women occupy twenty seats in the senate of Pakistan whereas the number of reserved seats is only seventeen (Zafar, 2018). Notwithstanding the increased number of women in parliament, they have still not secured equal rights and positions in Pakistan's political, economic and social milieu because of the stalwart oppositional mindset, which is not so easily transformed.

In consort with Pakistan, international bodies are also operating with the same agenda in mind. For instance, United Nations (UN) is actively working on female emancipation by trying to break the fetters restricting women's advancement. According to United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA):

Pakistan Vision 2025 has embedded five components of women's empowerment into its objectives, including activities that promote women's self-worth, right to determine their choices, access to opportunities and resources, right and power to control their lives, both within and outside the home, and ability to influence social change (Women's Empowerment, n.d).

Given these improvements, it can be seen that tireless efforts are being made for women's empowerment in Pakistan. However, not all women have access to this seemingly auspicious environment. In fact, very few women can enjoy these opportunities because of restrictions on girls and women set by families. Given the prevailing situation, it would not be wrong to say that the status of women in Pakistan differs significantly between the upper and lower classes and the urban and rural communities due to the impact of both unequal socioeconomic development and tribal society on women's lives ("Situation of Women in Pakistan," 2017).

Policy initiatives often miscalculate the effects of subsisting problems while attempting to fathom the roots of women's oppression and the meagre opportunities offered to them. As a result, women are largely excluded in political, social and economic institutions. Although women constitute nearly half of the population of the country, they form only 22% of the labor force and receive only 18% of the income (Khan, 2021). Let's comprehend it in this way: 5% of women hold prestigious positions in different institutions in Pakistan, but their successes are generalized to support the claim that the other 95% of women in society are empowered. Another confusion arises due to the conflict between laws arising from the different legal systems that are in operation, such as the appellate Shariat Bench, Federal Shariat Court and Criminal Law Forums. These parallel judicial systems are the product of 1977-1986 amendments. The contradictions in laws badly affects women's rights and makes the sincerity of legal efforts to improve their position seem dubious.

The interplay of formal statutory laws, Islamic laws, and customary practices is shaping women's lives in Pakistan. The problem is that equality enshrined in formal laws is negated by customary practices that allow the male members of the family to sell, buy, and exchange women as commodities and kill and murder them in the name of honour (Women in Pakistan, 2000).

Another dilemma arises insofar as international support and laws are incongruent with the national laws of Pakistan. The international laws such as the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) are not practical in implementation. CEDAW defines a unique definition of discrimination against females and calls for states to prevent gender inequity and violations of women's rights. Similarly, the political system fails to provide full protection to female politicians. The obnoxious behavior of some male politicians and the use of abusive language against females by their male colleagues in parliament are some examples exposed by the media (Imran, 2016). The hindrances to political leadership by women depend on traditions, deep-seated misogyny and social practices that do not allow women to speak out loudly. The attention to female politicians has emerged, because it is essential not only at national level but also at the international level (Pittman, 2014). Hence, the gap between *de facto* realities of women's life and *de jure* equality of gender reflected in formal laws is too wide. The promises to give equitable opportunities to women have not been fulfilled.

UN Efforts to Protect Women's Rights

It is no surprise that the omission of women's rights from world philosophies and canons created no proper environment for women's emancipation. Gradually, as consciousness about human rights and international law has developed, the concept of protection of women rights has also started to grow. Nonetheless, anomalies continue to be reflected in important international documents too, because it remains very difficult to grasp the significance of women's rights. Even documents adopted by international bodies for human rights failed to recognize the importance of separate rights for men and women (Morsink, 1991). They have continued to employ possessive nouns with the understanding that masculine nouns or pronouns would stand for the feminine as well.

To make the international environment secure for women and to allow them to enjoy viable choices in their lives, the UN proclaims itself an active body all over the world. Interestingly, the UN has addressed women's status as a human rights issue since its inception (Arat, 2015). Nonetheless, gender biases prevailed throughout the twentieth century. Morsink indicated that the word "man" was employed in the first draft of Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (Morsink, 1991). A Soviet delegate objected to the use of words such as "all men are created equal," but his objection was countered. Morsink further explained that some members of delegation claimed "When we say 'all men are brothers', we mean that all human beings are brothers and we are not differentiating between men and women." Notwithstanding the objections, the wording remained the same for some time. A later amendment was made, so the Preamble of UDHR includes a specific reference to the "equal rights of men and women" (Morsink, 1991; see also "Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)"). So it would not be wrong to say that gender gaps were evident even in the UN documents, and in the UN itself, which did not have women in high office posts but mostly employed them in clerical and lower-paying jobs. Thus, if occupational segregation was visible in international organizations too, this reveals that a deep understanding of women's empowerment was lacking.

Despite these discrepancies, international level efforts were made to empower women. After decolonization, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) 1946 was formed with the objective of promoting equality between men and women ("Commission on the Status of Women," n.d.). Later, several agreements and institutions were initiated for the same cause, such as UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) 1976, which was developed as a specialized agency of the UN working with national governments to promote gender equality ("UN Creates

New Structure for Empowerment of Women,” 2010), and which has supported numerous projects and initiatives all over the developing world that promote the political, economic, and social rights of women. Thereafter, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly. It is usually considered to be the international bill of rights for women and was enforced on September 2, 1981 (“Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women,” n.d.). The principle of equality has been enshrined within its preamble and within its 30 articles that demand national action to end discrimination against women. It is based on the belief that basic human rights include the true equality of men and women. CEDAW is considered a comprehensive convention as it covers all form of rights such as political participation, health, education, employment, marriage, family relations and equality before the law.

Moreover, UN efforts to give women representation in the parliament of Pakistan is worth mentioning for gender-sensitive legislation. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) helped in the creation of the Women's Parliamentary Caucus (Pakistan: Breaking the glass ceiling, 2010). Consequently, two critical bills on domestic violence and sexual harassment were floated on the floor. In 2008, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) sponsored a project called Strengthening Democracy through Parliamentary Development in Pakistan (Pakistan: Breaking the glass ceiling, 2010). Along with the UN, many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are seemingly active in the implementation of UN laws and regulations. These organizations are working to enhance the lives of women and to improve the working conditions for women through public education campaigns, the design of new gender-sensitive laws and marketing campaigns. Since several of these organizations have been active in Pakistan, a considerable change has occurred. For instance, women are being empowered legally. Nonetheless, breaking through the glass ceiling and attaining widespread women's emancipation remains challenging. Many organizations are still working to bring Pakistan into conformity with the ideals of the CEDAW, which need to influence all of society.

Commitments of Pakistan to Women's Constitutional Rights

Pakistan has embraced significant key international commitments to women's rights and gender equality such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action and the Sustainable Development Goals (“UN Women: Asia and the Pacific,” n.d.). The UN efforts in Pakistan are reducing glass ceiling effects by creating a decent work environment and income security for women. Unequivocally, a lot of changes have been made in Pakistan's constitution to empower women since the beginning of the 21st century. Equal status has been granted to women in the constitution of Pakistan, as Article 25 (1, 2 and 3) called all citizens equal before the law. Article 25A 25(1) describes “all citizens to be equal before the law and entitled to equal protection of the law” whereas Article 25(2) declares that “there shall be no discrimination based on sex alone.” Additionally, article 2(3) permits the state to create special rules for specific issues faced by women and children (Equality of Citizens, 2012, 15). Moreover, article 34 certifies women's participation in all spheres of life and directs the state to take apposite measures enabling women so that they can participate in social activities (Full Participation of Women in National Life, 2012, 18).

Given the legal picture, it is reasonable to infer that strong legislation is empowering women in society. Certainly, protective laws such as the Women's Protection Act are present in

Pakistan, yet implementation of these laws is weak. It appears that legislation has done very little to change the attitudes of people and their practices, so this leads to a pessimistic view of the future. The Women's Protection Act, which provided women security against rape, was passed in 2006. In 2010, the Protection Against Harassment of Women at Workplace Act was passed to stop harassment. Many cases of harassment were reported after the enactment of this law. However, there are difficulties addressing harassment cases in practice because of the new complications that have transpired due to the surge of social media and social websites. Many women face online harassment of different, such as sexual remarks, name-calling and rape threats ("Measuring Pakistani Women's Experiences of Violence," 2017).

A new act adopted some measures to provide a secure environment for Pakistani women and girls in 2011. This was a detailed and comprehensive act in the domain of women's protection (Lari, 2011). However, the envisaged results could not be attained at a larger level, so many cases have been reported even after this act was enacted. Moreover, additional inequalities have been exposed especially among vulnerable groups such as poor and uneducated families.

Additionally, the National Assembly of Pakistan passed the 18th Amendment in 2010, which transferred authority over several social issues to provinces and gave them responsibility for legislation concerning issues of women's rights within the purview of provinces. Hence, provinces became independent in overseeing the social situation and working on women's emancipation ("Constitutional Rights of Women," 2015). Now, some provinces are proclaiming the eradication of any imbalances between men and women.

The Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, which intended to stop violence against women in private spaces, was tabled in 2012. Ironically, there was an objection to this law by one influential political party, Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F), that called it an un-Islamic law weakening men in society. The Council of Islamic Ideology (CII) also called it un-Islamic (Khattak, 2019).

In 2016, the murder of the social media figure Qandeel Baloch triggered a call to stop honour killings in Pakistan that resulted in the enactment of the Anti-Honour Crime Bill (Sartorio, 2017). The "Anti-Honour Killing Act" declared that murders in the name of family honour would be considered criminal offences. It also set a hard penalty for such crimes. However, ultimately, the law has failed control over these crimes (Rashid, 2018). According to this act, the rape of the mentally and physically ill as well as minors would be punishable (Bilal, 2016). Unfortunately, there are loopholes that preclude adequate prevention of these crimes. This impotence is largely due to unchanging social attitudes towards the problem. These laws are nothing more than pieces of paper, because they cannot deter crimes. Constant fear still oppresses most females, because they cannot marry against the wishes of their families and honour killings are still not ended. Furthermore, deep-rooted misogyny is observable through different widely accepted traditions, such as unequal rights in inheritance and minimum ages of marriage.

Table 1: Governmental Steps for Women's Rights

	Governmental Steps for Women's Rights	Year
1.	The Protection of Women Act	2006
2.	Protection Against Harassment of Women at Workplace Act	2010
3.	The Acid Control and Acid Prevention Act	2011
4.	Prevention of Anti-Women Practices	2011
5.	Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act	2012
6.	Criminal Law (Amendment Offence of Rape) Act	2016
7.	Criminal Law (Amendment Offences in the name of Honour) Act	2016
8.	Prevention of Ecteronic Crimes Act	2016
9.	Hindu Marriage Act	2017

The Election Act (2017) required political parties to have at least 5% of female candidates contesting in general elections (national and provincial assemblies). It also forbade any effort to deter women's participation in elections, either as candidates or voters. However, all mainstream national parties kept close to the minimum percentage and over 45% of political parties did not field a single female candidate in the 2018 elections of Pakistan (Batool, 2019). Interestingly, female politicians mostly enter politics by using reserved seats rather than contesting prior candidates. It can be assumed that their chances to progress in politics remain grim, because they do not participate in campaigns or interact with the people. The various law-making efforts outlined above indicate that horizontal endeavors are being made but that deep the social changes are not taking place.

Conclusion

Barriers to women's emancipation are mostly unacknowledged due to several reasons that have massively affected the progress of women. Notwithstanding the commitment of the government of Pakistan to international forums such as CEDAW, the position of women in the country remains weak. Women are excluded from decision-making positions of power. Although there is some evidence of gradual transformations, these are not sufficient to overcome obstacles women face in the workplace. These issues are rooted in the patriarchal structure of society and the glass-ceiling. Although the constitution of Pakistan is emphatic about women's rights and the country is committed to meeting international standards, discrimination persists and appears hard to change due to a common misunderstanding of women's emancipation. When one looks into small and large actions of the state for women's empowerment, such as efforts for education, employment and political participation, one may observe some signs of change and empowerment of women, but social level change remains limited.

Since state-level efforts have not been very effective in bringing about positive change, the discourse of women's empowerment in Pakistan has become a figment of the imagination. The government is trying to endow more power to women, but the challenges remain diverse and

difficult. The transitory and non-authoritative role of women in the public sphere impedes efforts to increase their status and rights. Although a handful of females has acquired the highest positions in some professions, many could not perform at the same level due to invisible obstacles, so they lost their justification for social discrimination. These women presented as role models serve to minimize the negative impact of the glass ceiling. There is still a significant number of girls and women, who face obstacles in making their own choices and choosing the path of their lives. Their absence in decision-making affairs at the domestic and public level is pushing the state backwards.

Certainly, Pakistan has made endeavors to ensure women's empowerment, but at the practical level, many women are unable to perceive themselves responsible decision-makers, as they have remained apart from these official advances. Many females remain gratified to spend their lives in a miserable condition. Some contend that their entry into public and political life is enough to prove that they are empowered. Ultimately, very few understand the meaning of women's empowerment, which is a frame of mind that direly depends on social change.

Recommendations

This paper is exclusively aimed at understanding the barriers to women's empowerment in Pakistan. Although this is a social problem, it harms the economy and development of the state. To attain women's empowerment, change is required at three levels. First, at an individual level, behaviors can be changed through education, because education will make individual women more self-confident. Hence, women would be able to speak out for the development of the state. Second, at the national level, social institutions and framework can and should be overhauled. These institutions and frameworks should ensure equal opportunities for both men and women. Third, the state system must become favourable for women and must provide a safe environment wherein they can act as a conscientious citizens and promote the economy of Pakistan.

1. Since the society of Pakistan is feudal and tribal, women are treated as commodities. Girls are not sent to school and most people are linked to a form of nontraditional education that never addresses the gender gap. Hence, mass illiteracy needs to be addressed. Likewise, considering women as creative human beings and contributors to society will shape better social attitudes.
2. Some women prefer to work in so-called "soft" areas, which fortifies the glass ceiling. In order to stand up to violence/discrimination, women must take responsibility courageously by attaining education. They must be convinced that they can work in every field. Educated girls should join modern professions such as information technology and banking, which do not depend on physical power but intellectual competence.
3. The disparity between laws and practices must be recognized. In this regard, the support of the clergy and the understanding of the links between women's empowerment and economic development is crucial for Pakistan's growth. It is necessary to inculcate the idea that both men and women have the power to shape their lives and society through the seminaries.
4. The government of Pakistan should promote innovation and small businesses initiated by women. The encouragement of businesses owned by women will help prepare the female workforce to boost the formal economy of Pakistan.

Overall, significant work is required for the women of Pakistan, because gender equality is not only an important developmental objective by itself but is also directly linked to economic progress. Essentially, women in Pakistan should be given an understanding of self-worth, equal access to opportunities, power to control personal lives within and outside the home, rights to determine their choices and abilities to influence social change. In order to promote a deep understanding of women's empowerment, collaborations of the clergy, political parties, the educational sector and media is indispensable. Gender perspectives must be highlighted in security, development and trade sectors.

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