

# **Pakistan: I Still Love You**

*Assay by an extraordinarily ordinary woman  
subject aka citizen of Pakistan.*

**Dr.Rakhshinda Perveen**



**Gufhtugu Publications**

© 2018 Rakhshinda Perveen

All rights reserved to the Author. However any part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, for non-commercial use with the suggested citation; *“Pakistan:I Still Love You, Assay by an Extraordinarily Ordinary woman subject aka Citizen of Pakistan Dr.Rakhshinda Perveen. Gufhtugu Publications, 2018”* without the prior written permission of the Author.

Author can be reached at: [dr.r.perveen@gmail.com](mailto:dr.r.perveen@gmail.com)

Printed in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

First Printed: 23<sup>rd</sup> March, 2018

ISBN: 978-969-7758-13-5

Number of Copies: 1,000

Price: 1,000 PKR, 10\$ USD

Published By:

**Gufhtugu Publications**

Islamabad, Pakistan

[info@gufhtugu.com](mailto:info@gufhtugu.com) | [www.Gufhtugu.com](http://www.Gufhtugu.com)

Join us on Social Media @Gufhtugu

# **Acknowledgment**

This book owes its existence to my stupidity, urge to stay foolish if not angry, and sincere advice to abstain from "suicidal writing" by Yousuf Shahid, an unsung genius - a polyglot and polymath. Mr. Shahid assisted me in editing the unpublished matter included in the book with his unconditional sincerity and matchless editing skills.



# **Dedicated to Stranded Biharis**

## **Biharis**

*Thinking and crying silently about stranded Biharis, the most unfortunate people – even more unfortunate than today's refugees from Syria, more unfortunate than landless Palestinians. They are ridiculed, misunderstood and forgotten. May Allah forgive me for not being able to mainstream their case in activism.*

*Civil society of Pakistan could not find a single moment to raise any concern, organize any protest, vigil, or solidarity show on the predicament of stranded Biharis. This Pakistan belongs to Panjabis, Pashtuns, Balochis, Sindhis and elites who are above all ethnic, religious and cultural identities. Who am I ? What am I doing here? Every day I absorb and assimilate more dozes of exclusion: subtle hatreds, unfairness, marginalization, discrimination. I can't advocate my case. The mighty ones of the elite civil society have killed me with their hostility and harshness. I am determined. I am alive. Buried alive may be!*



# **I still love you Pakistan!**

I am told that I am not from your soil

I was rejected

I was ridiculed

Still I am not accepted

This is Unrelated!

What is Relevant is:

A devotion I have inherited

From the souls of my descendants

What is Timeless, is my love for you

**Pakistan!**



# Contents

Page 0: It's not a preface! .....	0
<b>I. Unfinished Writings! Curt, Clipped and Closed</b>	
Chronicles .....	1
1) Allah .....	3
2) A Note to Self! .....	4
3) Abuse –Attitudes –Activism .....	5
4) Arm Chair Activists.....	6
5) Bullying/Harassment/Women/Men .....	8
6) Civil Bureaucracy & Meritocracy.....	10
7) Emotional Abuse! .....	13
8) Letter To A Donor Agency .....	14
9) Morality, Patriarchy & Society.....	18
10) Pakistan/Politics /Death/ Oligarchy.....	21
11) Stray Thoughts of a <i>Chai Vali</i> .....	22
12) Talk with Taliban.....	23
13) The Story of an Unknown Woman.....	24
14) Miscellaneous.....	27
<b>II. Civil and Cast-Off and Candid Chronicles.....</b>	<b>29</b>
1) Change? .....	31
2) Disability Is Not Absence of Ability .....	39
3) Gender Mainstreaming: Just a Myth or a Reality? .....	45
4) My Sheroes from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.....	49
5) Please Ban Dowry Mr. Prime Minister .....	44
6) The 'Idiot Box' is Challenging Times And Changing Values .....	61
7) The Euphoria About Women Emancipation .....	68
8) To Be or Not To Be .....	72
9) Women: Thy Name is Peace-Building. A Non- Diplomatic Outlook.....	77

10) Women's Beat! .....	81
11) A Peek into the Patriarchal Media .....	87
12) Acknowledging — Inconvenient Inequalities .....	92
13) Ageism and Competent Women .....	96
14) Beware Of 'Benevolent' Sexism. ....	101
15) Bullied Not Broken! .....	106
16) Contraception!.....	110
17) Disdain for Disability .....	115
18) Engendering Policing in Pakistan .....	119
19) Implementing Gender-Based Taxation.....	123
20) In Praise of Capital Punishment.....	128
21) Intervention against Gender Inequality Needed ..	132
22) Just Joking! .....	137
23) Misogyny Knows No Boundaries .....	141
24) Missing — Women in National Security .....	145
25) Needed — Law Against Dowry .....	150
26) Of Stigma, Schizophrenia and State .....	155
27) Rethinking Our Approach as a Nation .....	159
28) Sexual Harassment at Workplaces.....	153
29) Social Entrepreneurship .....	167
30) South Asian Women In Politics .....	172
31) Struggles of Soldier Women .....	176
32) The Forgotten Biharis.....	180
33) Time To Wake Up About Abuse .....	185
34) Understanding Child Abuse .....	189
35) Violence against Women in Pakistan-So What? ..	193
36) Violence against Women.....	199
37) Change: Through The Gender Lens .....	203
38) Child Labour: Thinking Beyond Empty Slogans .....	210
39) Born and Bred in Islamabad: City Looks Stranger Today .....	214
40) Media Matters.....	218
41) The Role Of Men In Contraception.....	225

<b>III.</b>	<b>G for Gender .....</b>	<b>231</b>
1)	<b>Human Rights, Abortion and Disabled Women—A Snapshot from Pakistan .....</b>	<b>233</b>
2)	<b>My Post-Feminist View On The Representation Of Women In Media .....</b>	<b>242</b>
3)	<b>Legalising Prostitution—The Wisdom of the UN? .....</b>	<b>245</b>
4)	<b>Daughters-Not Counted .....</b>	<b>251</b>
5)	<b>Do Our Population Policy Framers Know this Woman? .....</b>	<b>253</b>
6)	<b>A Woman’s Work.....</b>	<b>255</b>
7)	<b>“Suitable Sectors” for Women.....</b>	<b>257</b>
8)	<b>On Gender Equality.....</b>	<b>259</b>
9)	<b>Because I Am A Girl.....</b>	<b>260</b>
10)	<b>Gender Biases In Languages .....</b>	<b>261</b>
11)	<b>Patriarchy Unlimited!.....</b>	<b>263</b>
12)	<b>How to End Violence against Women and Girls? .....</b>	<b>264</b>
13)	<b>My 2 Cents (Obviously Nobody Took It!) .....</b>	<b>268</b>
14)	<b>Surviving as a Woman Consultant! .....</b>	<b>271</b>
15)	<b>Thriving Without God Father’s Leadership.....</b>	<b>273</b>
16)	<b>Who are these Medical Doctors? .....</b>	<b>277</b>

\* \* \* \* \*



## **Page 0: It's Not a Preface!**

Elites from politics, civil society, military and civil bureaucracy, and wizards from journalism and media are always eligible and meant to opine about Pakistan. They are definitely well informed, pragmatic, emotionally intelligent people and high achievers. Hence this tome is neither a satire nor a spoof. This is not a picket. These are not some of my own most favourite ignored, side-lined, non-elite intellectual pieces, as I have yet to develop the courage to make them public.

It is a product of empathy, weaved with dry tears, silenced screams, shattered dreams, inconvenient but not full truth, broken trust, lost identities, failed marketing, unpaid activism and mixed bag advocacy. This does not belong to any existing and recognized genus.

This is merely an unedited collection of the honest (not necessarily correct from different pragmatic parameters) interpretation and articulation of feelings and realities –that the creator of this collection experienced and / or observed and has fit into different frameworks and forums. I am not obliged to unpack the title and justify my statement.

It is not my memoir. It is not a verdict. It is nothing. There is however, no such thing as nothing. So here it can be labelled as an anthology (dated and undated) of my unfinished ,unskilled writings, the tales and the theatre in my heart , the clutter and clamour in my head, and voices and vibes from my soul, guised as anger, angle, self-talk, socio-political accounts, annotations, way of thinking and romance.

**Dr. Rakhshinda...<sup>1</sup>, Islamabad-Pakistan**

---

<sup>1</sup> My surname does not tell any story. Some well-wishers and media tycoons with immaculate English call names like Begum Bum. My brief bio could be Non Elite Qualified Specialist on Gender | honest tax payer |



**Unfinished Writings!  
Curt, Clipped and  
Closed Chronicles**



# Allah

- ***I am thankful to Allah who created me with a Muslim identity in an educated and urban middle class family in Pakistan. My worst nightmares are to be a non-Muslim and physically disabled poor woman in Pakistan.***

- *Life is a stage and I am an actor— you made me beloved —perhaps I did not fit into that role— now I m a lover —Your lover —then I was happy in uncertainty, now I am in a blessed pain for sure. Thank You my Master Director Divine!*

- Is it pardonable by God if a Muslim woman commmits suicide because:
  - ✓ She cannot sustain herself?
  - ✓ She cannot live alone anymore?
  - ✓ She is tired of living in a sick society?
  - ✓ She is tired of living under fear?
  - ✓ She is not getting her due share in inheritance?
  - ✓ She is not getting a dignified exit at work place?
  - ✓ She is not getting any alimony after divorce?
  - ✓ She is not getting married?

# **A Note to Self!**

## **Destination Is neither My Destiny nor Destination ☺**

Between death and defeat, surrender and anger, sadness and madness, fooled and fairly dealt, mercy and love, time and age, beauty and brains, selflessness and selfishness, winning and losing, craziness and carefulness, and rather I know- I am strong enough to be hated, fooled, cheated and hurt again.

Why most of the people aka friends meet me? Job, reference, recommendation, borrow money, name dropping. Well, thanks Allah but I want to exit from this role. I would rather die alone rather than living in the false perception that people like me.

.....

I am not an option

I am no longer that idiot

Finally I told this to an old friend

Who is in the friends 'circle of those who caused me emotional, professional and financial damage

It hurts

But maintaining a fake friendship, unilateral sincerity is toxic

Every day and in every way I am becoming lonelier and excluded but I am gaining inner peace

# **Abuse –Attitudes –Activism**

**We need new slogans, for instance:**

- I. Neither a Bhabhi nor a Begum
- II. Proud to be a self-made Professional Woman!
- III. I am an unpaid Activist!
- IV. Down with Choreographed Activism!
- V. A nervous breakdown is better than a moral  
breakdown!
- VI. Empowerment has a price!
- VII. Yes, I am a Divorced Mother and I am honest!
- VIII. Yes, I am a dowry violence victim turned  
Survivor!
- IX. I am a Non-Elite self-made Pakistani!

# Arm Chair Activists

Today I learnt a new concept

## **Arm chair activists**

In the most literal of terms, 'armchair activism' is any sort of activist message, cause or effort you publicly put forward and support...from your couch/bed/comfort of your own home without having to physically leave your space to advocate and get involved.

Fight Against Dowry and struggle against tax discrimination for single mothers and women, two causes closest to my heart and silence of the society at large.

Fight against dowry is one of my key failures; I spent so much money, time, energy in 20 years to advocate for this cause without push of the class. Nothing tangible happened in legislation.

A vast majority of young people still aspires for and opt for lavish weddings and vulgar display of wealth and power. Most of the Women from my age group and circle opt for liking makeup saloon pages, checking in on high-end development initiatives that gain attention by mainstream academia; media and corporate agencies are donor driven and donor dependent.

Renowned and elite activists and their groups and commissions failed to recognize the spectrum of the issue. I was side-lined at many occasions. Ridiculed continuously, hollow activism flourishes in Pakistan and in many other developing countries

Ps: Won't be surprised if I see any start up doing themed funerals in this pretentious society and making money and receiving International awards.

# **Bullying/Harassment/ Women/Men**

- Non elite women
- Women with no social power
- Women with no male support
- Women who are divorced, hardworking, honest and intelligent (but not street smart) are the worst sufferers at work places

Remember,

Humiliation and emotional abuse are non-cognizable crimes and for

qualified

competent

virtuous

but non-elite professional the emotional health should be on the highest priority

Don't compromise

You can't change the system

Get rid of toxic people

Preserve you mental energy

Invest in intellectual pursuits

Serve humanity

Struggle for human rights and women rights

because you are not an overnight suddenly manufactured expert and/or paid activist

Remain humble

Remain kind

When you lose from worldly parameters; don't become bitter but a better version of your own self

**Raziq is Allah.**

- I receive at least ten complaints in a month of harassment of police women PSP and NON PSP both

As these are informally conveyed as more of a catharsis; I can't take up the cases as per legislation

However the more important concern is how to empower women in police: How to address harassment by older men in police and those with superior ranks; how to inculcate feminist spirit even in many police women and civilian women in police with patriarchal mind-set?!

If there is no solution then let's declare our defeat and death of *Ghairat* in Pakistan and observe at least three days of mourning and tell our daughters, sisters, nieces, cousins and friends not to get high education, not to pass examination with flying colours, not to get prestigious fellowships, not to get recruited in police but find a man who has the potential of becoming a senior ranked officer or business tycoon or a filthy rich politician and learn the tactics of retaining the husband, the obedient powerful husband and spend an easy life of a *Begum* kitty parties, in gyms, in beauty salons and so on and so forth.

Kindly note that police is the microcosm of our society misdeeds, mishaps, harassment, happen in all sectors and at all work places.

# Civil Bureaucracy & Meritocracy

**May 29, 2014**

I was feeling bad, hurt and depressed while  
analysing certain professional matters:  
how merit was violated  
how vulgar display of power is accepted  
how my entitlements and earned credits and  
share were taken away  
how they tried to humiliate me and rupture my  
nerves  
how some of my closest friends betrayed me  
how some of the most trusted colleagues  
stabbed me at the back  
how so called feminists champs. of women rights  
(women included) gloated at my personal  
journey and left no opportunity to spread  
rumours etc., about me

But  
Then

The thought that I am not the one who is doing  
all this.

There is no such "thing" as mine but my grave  
and that the Ultimate reality is death and there  
is a Day of Judgment calmed me

My pain is still with me

But

I am no longer suffering- Dr. Rakhshinda  
Perveen

- **Nawaal Al Saadawi**, the woman whose thoughts and ideas gave me courage in early years to evolve as a physician turned gender specialist

I used to think that one day she will get Nobel Peace prize. How stupid I was/I am!

Alas, today not many in development sector know about her or if they know, they do not talk about her, do not quote her. This sector is thriving on networking and opportunistic mentality and still claims to be the champs of human rights, truthful and whistle blowers.(December 31, 2014).

## **2013**

- My perspective is that non-elites and especially women have only two choices; either to continue to enjoy the convenience of subordination or be ready to pay the cost of empowerment. My ability to remain an awakened dreamer and readiness to evolve bring uniqueness to my perspectives that include belief in the power of media, research based activism and advocacy, creativity, social inclusion, challenging the status quo without confrontation, and social entrepreneurship.

- Today she resigned from a job that she got strictly on merit  
Still she was compelled to sleep with an influential man  
Finally freed from bonded slavery.....  
Finally overcame the emotional trauma caused by recent humiliation

Yes, she knows more hardships are on her cards  
Lesson re-re-re-learned: women can be perpetrators too! Women can be patriarchs too!  
Pakistan is meant for power elites  
Neither individuals nor institutions are honest yet we want systems to be honest.  
Apologies to all those sincere ones in my life, who do not wish me to post such statuses, appear normal and keep open my chances of getting good opportunity in professional sphere.  
Sorry to disappoint  
she can't be a winner and normal the way this hypocritical society accepts.  
At the age of 45 she can afford to earn some more losses.

- 
- “*Bhabhis*”, “*Begums*” and the Bureaucracy are incontrovertible stumbling blocks in the advancement and strengthening of gender mission/fabric in our society.
  - I hope and pray that Gender/women rights in particular, and development practice in general be respected as specialized and serious disciplines by the decision makers and such key projects be managed by qualified professionals and not amateurs, at this level.

# **Emotional Abuse!**

**2016**

Empowerment is the Remedy for Emotional Abuse, Empowerment is the antidote. What is empowerment? In simplest words it is the freedom to dream, to dream what you want to dream, freedom to choose your career, life partner, freedom to choose your friends and the freedom to step out of abusive relationships. **KINDLY DO NOT EQUATE Freedom with Social Irresponsibility, freedom to abuse another person or even an animal is NOT THE FREEDOM but an immoral act and cognizable crime in many countries. And NEVER FORGET TO TELL YOUR STORY.**

Maya Angelou, an inspiration for all disadvantaged people with dreams has so aptly said that there is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.

When you tell your story to yourself only or to a group or to the whole world through internet, you are actually coming out of denial, healing yourselves and you know that you are actually **CHANGING YOUR STORY** What you told was your past, when you decide to tell you are another person, you are transforming, you are that Empowered Person who is rejecting power imbalances and contributing towards a world free of violence and abuses.

# Letter to a Donor Agency

**Dear Donors,**

## **Greetings**

As you know, month | date | year, would be my last day of work with the project\_\_\_\_. After tendering my resignation last month on Month | date | year, I have been working from home with the consent of the head of the public sector organization where I have been seconded by you.

I am writing this letter to thank the colleagues, and also sharing some thoughts about the conditions and circumstances which pushed me to quit a job I had eagerly looked forward to, enjoyed the first six months or so, but then could not continue due to a host of disturbing factors.

I am thankful to you for selecting me on merit as an Expert for the project to train an important and impotent group of civil bureaucracy through a long and competitive process. I'm also indebted for the professional support which was extended to me during my assignments, most of which I had done without much support from the Team selected by you on the recommendation of the partner government.

I understand that the colleagues in donor's team have some idea about the reasons of my resignation. However, I feel it is ethically imperative that I should put on record the specific reasons of my departure from the project with a heavy heart.

For the last 4 months or so (that precisely started on March 8 – the international day of women) I faced bullying, harassment and emotional abuse from the co-consultants and the Director General of Pakistani government's organization. Lately, the humiliation had become so regular that it became traumatizing and unbearable. I was regularly bullied and made to apologize and ask for forgiveness for unspecified faults.

This bullying and harassment troubled me deeply because I was the only one who was made to work on the deliverables and there nobody offered any technical support, albeit they demanded and got the credit as co-authors because of the high-handedness of the D.G. and a co-consultant.

In the hindsight, I feel as if I made a wrong choice by accepting a job where the other members of the team were inexperienced, lacked the stated qualifications, and were engaged courtesy their personal connections with the selection panel in the Pakistani organization. The evident huge gap between my experience and expertise and that of the consultants, seems made them insecure. This led to their ganging up against me and a well-orchestrated intimidation was carried out which made me nervous and psyched. Had I continue any longer, I may have had a brain haemorrhage!

I am putting this on record that I needed this job to support my daughter's education, and I was capable of doing the job of the entire team single-handedly, had there not been all that harassment, bullying and intimidation.

The irony of the situation and of this project is that the very gender discrimination this project sought to combat and end, in fact thrived in the project team and National office.

I do, nevertheless, understand the compulsions of donor agencies that have to concede a lot and look the other way for the larger interest of the programs and projects, and to save the institutional partnerships.

Being someone who has been fighting gender discrimination and exploitation for the last 25 years, I do reckon that life is not always fair but still worth living and go down fighting. But sometimes, when the situation is too unfriendly, one must exit the room alive.

I admit that I have learnt a lot from this experience and like to denote that the current and the former Directors of the National office made me better understand as to why Pakistan did not progress. Their personal interests and an attitude to prefer personal networks over merit impede things.

I hope that such key projects be managed by qualified professionals and not amateurs; and the key decision makers in such institutions are not the only biggest stumbling blocks in the way of gender mainstreaming and empowerment!

I also expect (though the probability is too low) that senior management of the donor's team and the powerful foreign government would seriously take into account this letter and my 'forced' departure.

A detailed exit report delineating the deliverables and my outputs is attached below as annexes.

**Sincerely**  
**XYZ**

**A qualified non-elite specialist woman worker**

# Morality, Patriarchy & Society

**2012**

- There is a point of view among different sections of the society that women and girls should dress up modestly to avoid abuse. While common sense is highly recommended in dressing style too, a revealing dress does not make any abuse legitimate. Remember the cases of incest and child sexual abuses – dress, make up, looks can only be presented as lame excuses for an offence.
- Men have future, women have a past: let's change the stereo typing, we all have a past where we don't live or should not live and we all have and should have a future, better, brighter than the past, enjoy the moment, stay blessed, life is too short....( September 14,2015)
- Today I was at a candle vigil for "*Damini*". I was rather disappointed to see that leading human rights defenders were not in favour of capital punishment for such rapists rather they were chanting slogans that rapists must be severely punished. (December 31, 2012)
- India, Pakistan and all other Societies, all our men should become impotent; it seems women are giving birth to Rapists only. Wonder where is God, Ishwar, Allah etc., when a fragile young girl is raped/gang raped.
- Pakistan can never have legislation against dowry and lavish weddings so long there are

such insensitive politicians and so called human rights loving pro-poor elite dominated civil society. Feeling sad. Rakhshinda

- Very few in the Civil Society and development sector understand dowry violence. .It includes compulsion for lavish weddings and culturally endorsed practices like denial of inheritance to daughters, vulvar/bride price and disputed dawat as well besides, demand said and unsaid and emotional and physical abuses. It is very distinctively shameful form of violence that is endorsed culturally and sanctioned socially, not only against women but men as well. It remains buried in domestic violence but it is not just another shade of domestic violence. In my fifteen years of pioneering works on advocacy, research and training on issues of dowry violence I have repeatedly noticed a strong elitist consensus against raising this issue. I am no longer hurt but will continue to call a spade a spade till my last breath, no matter how much more I suffer, am humiliated and ridiculed by different powerful segments of this society including some self-styled custodians of human rights seen as renowned well marketed activists in Pakistan.

- **What is Culture? Morality?**

As someone who is still angry with what Zia's dark regime did to the youth of her generation, specifically in terms of intellectual retardation of growth, I am really very shocked and depressed when people, apparently educated and modern, judge women.

Why should honour, humour and horror be associated with a woman's body and/or her sexuality? Public displays of affection (such as hugging and kissing on cheeks by members of opposite sex in educational institutions) may not be approved by the self-styled custodians of morality in our society but the question is what morality is basically.

What is our culture? Should we then ban people from reading Heer-Ranjha or Sassi-Punnu -- because after all these are love stories?

I do not want to impose my ideology and views on other people but I believe that public displays of affection among young people are far better than acts of violence and harassment normally seen in public places.

Enough damage has been done to this land in the name of religion and culture. Now the time has arrived to revisit conventional wisdom and morality (October, 2009).

# **Pakistan/Politics /Death/ Oligarchy**

**A. *Benazir Bhutto*-death of dreams. December 27, 2007.**

**B.** Pakistan is suffering from two extremes—intellectual bankruptcy and intellectual arrogance.

Allah/Divine save us from those arrogant people who are settled abroad and believe that they have best grey matter.

They do not dare to stay in Pakistan and work with real people in difficult areas but have the audacity of criticizing and ridiculing those who are working here with zeal and zest, who are honest tax payers and who are surviving in spite of having no social security, pensions, insurance etc. (2013)

# **Stray Thoughts of a *Chai* *Vali*:**

From clinical med. to public health  
From an introvert to an activist  
From a subordinate wife and abused child to  
a gender expert  
TV anchor  
Author  
University teacher  
Researcher  
Trainer  
Team leader  
Head of organizations  
Recipient of prestigious scholarships  
And YOU think Rakhshinda YOU are in charge  
of your life?  
Making Halva Puri selling tea  
Neither embarrassed nor ashamed!  
And miles to go before I sleep ....and miles to go  
before I sleep

# Talk with Taliban

In this post-election 2013 "new Pakistan", the talk of the town is talk with Taliban. PTI and PML-N want to give peace a chance through negotiations with these terrorists.

I am neither a popular TV anchor nor an expensive consultant and political analyst therefore I refrain from commenting on the selective naivety of the new leadership in Pakistan and making any intelligent or unintelligent guesses about the outcomes of these negotiations. However, being a non-elite self-made Pakistani woman, I am a qualified non-specialist to put forward a suggestion.

**If you all mighty men are determined to talk with Taliban. Kindly include at least two mothers who are still surviving the loss of their loved ones and seeing amputees around on daily basis with no place to seek hope.**

# **The Story of an Unknown Woman!**

## **(All characters are Fictional)-2009**

‘There is **no** greater **agony** than bearing an untold **story** inside you.’- **Maya Angelou**

She is a recognized professional with innovative thoughts, good organizational management skills and with the abilities of leadership in social development sector of Pakistan. In her nearly 30 years of practical life she has taken up many social causes as an individual which were later replicated or scaled up by other, larger organizations.

Her CV reflects her journey but what it does not depict is the fact that she has been living with unfavourable social conditions such as a single mother and an activist from a minority ethnic group, who raises voice against deeply rooted social evils like dowry and gender-based violence, and yet made an impact.

Most importantly it does not reflect the kind of violence that she faces in her personal life with an impact on her professional work.

Due to the sensitivities associated with the key player involved in her case she spent/ wasted a considerable part of her productive life under immense fear.

She could not avail many prestigious scholarships and opportunities to present her work at international policy forums and conferences because she was placed on ECL for

nearly 5 years. Getting out of that list took was taxing. She was exploited sexually and mentally. She suffered financial losses too.

Her dream of following a doctoral program also shattered. With great will power, she maintained her nerves and sanity intact. She was so scared by the mightiest institutions that she dared not to speak up.

In the public sphere she is seen as blunt and bold activist and she is an advocate of intellectual courage. However, she failed to raise voice against violence that was inflicted on her own self. The paradox in her life keeps on killing her at intellectual and spiritual levels both.

She wishes to heal herself and unveil this violence and the associated stories so that the future generations of her country as well as the international community know the certain truth that is relevant to them in terms of peace and security.

She started writing a book on this “secret” but she needed editorial assistance and safe environment. Since that book can never get published here and even if it does, she would be definitely punished (not by the law though).

She is determined to unveil the truth now not only because she feels a burden on her soul for the sins and crimes she has not committed and yet she was punished by the society and the state both; but also because she wants to disclose the truth about certain movers and shakers in Pakistan who enjoy public respect and are icons for many, especially youth of Pakistan.

She only wants her book to be public. She does not care even if she is killed or removed from

the scene afterwards as she too tired now and has nothing to lose.

# Miscellaneous

- **RIP**

Gender programming

I have joined as a gender consultant but I am not a feminist

I am a good Muslim and I am happily married

I worked hard on my marriage

I am a good woman and I don't need to work actually but..... suggested rather insisted so *Bhabhi* is here !

An unforgettable introduction

**P.S.:**

All characters and content are fictional

I am trying to post light catchy interesting humorous posts these days

- **Between political correctness and absolute honesty**

I dream of a policy where it is mandatory for each public and private organization to display on their sign boards and front desks the following statements:

Some Women have no rights

Caution!

**Misogyny ahead**

--

**Benevolent sexism Encouraged!**

....

• **If you are a thinking woman, jobless, vocal, blunt and non-elite woman and have to live in Pakistan with self-esteem and social respect**

**You must be married**

In 2017 I want to get married

Enough stigmatization

Scandalous attention

Ridiculing

Worst are those so called liberal male friends and acquaintances and many women too who appreciate you on face book and private conversations but in their own private sphere opt for conventional wisdom  
Have a Begum no matter even when she is cheating  
etc.

**My earned empowerment has taught me that marriage is an inevitable necessity in Pakistan.**

**Civil, Cast-Off  
And  
Candid Chronicles**



# Change?

*As a young girl who used to write poems against Zia's version of Islam, I used to believe that only youth can bring change and a critical mass of effective ideas and scrupulous people would bring change.*

Change is the buzz word in the current political glossary of Pakistan with or without the acknowledgment of Barak Obama's influence. One of the dictionary meanings of this word is "A transformation or transition from one state, condition, or phase to another". Nearly all our pinnacle politicians have pledged for a change in the country.

In May 2013, Pakistan experienced many changes. For instance, the country not only witnessed the confounding exit of the Peoples' Party but for its millions of followers/*Jialas* and *Jialis*, it was death of their dreams as well.

The newer but now the second biggest political party, PTI, used to raise a lot of clatter and clamour about corruption and partiality in the country and its Chair Mr. Imran Khan used to claim that in 90 days these vices would be eradicated. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa where PTI is in power not only the loss of governance has become order of the day but its consequences are a *déjà vu* for its masses. Alas, the sacrosanct tradition of nepotism is unhurt. One wonders where is the footing of the PTI?

In March 2013, according to pre-election different media reports Pakistan Muslim League-

Nawaz (PML-N) chief Nawaz Sharif vowed that his government would continue its work for the betterment of the people and would bring about positive change in the first 100 days of his government. I could not confirm whether the Prime Minister Mian Nawaz Sharif has the same posture now or not but I sincerely pray for his success.

The hallway of clout and mandate is more complicated than a labyrinth and the indicators of success are different for the miserable masses and the ruling elites. Therefore, being non-diplomatic and non-elite, I am naturally not eligible to critically discern the performance of our government or leaders in politics. However, like all self-made educated people here, I am a qualified specialist on Pakistan.

For years I toiled with the imaging of positive changes in Pakistani society. Growing up in the regime of the worst dictator *Zia-ul-Haq* and maintaining at least an average intellectual growth was indeed a miracle in my personal sphere. As a young girl who used to write poems against Zia's version of Islam, I used to believe that only youth can bring change and a critical mass of effective ideas and scrupulous people would bring change.

The kick and somersault of life taught me many lessons in different forms and shapes and resultantly, bit by bit I stopped thinking about law abiding, straight forward and virtuous people and youth centered and dependent change (or at least I trained myself to stop thinking so). I detached myself from the world of prose and

poems and opted for development literature and development practice.

I found that the pointers of progress of our nation and country such as those connected with the demography and family characteristics, employment and unemployment, poverty and inequality, social and health care expenditure, and trust and tolerance are dreadfully disquieting. The gaps between actual and projected data are as alarming as the gaps between the actual needs of the underprivileged communities and felt needs by the expensive often foreign nationals or dual national Pakistani technical experts. Different attempts have been made and many are still in progress to change the social development landscape in Pakistan.

However, it is high time to mull over on the entry points of positive and constructive social transformations in Pakistan. There are and could be multiple entry points and most certainly some are powerful than the others and some are more difficult than the others. Each entrance merits detailed analysis. I am restricting myself to one door that once open, would lead to a huge impact and a desired level of change can be achieved. This is none else but Education which is a dominant but difficult entry point of an ideal change in Pakistan.

The power of education is undisputed. Why is it testing in Pakistan? A conceivable simple and short answer is the intricate continuum of the country itself. We, the singular national Pakistanis, the honest tax payer Pakistanis and the struggling Pakistanis dare to live, breathe and dream in a land that has yet to determine its

undisputed identity, vision, quality of future and above all the attributes of the contract of the State with its society and people. Thus, education becomes a difficult subject here.

What should be the monetary resource allocation to the sector? What should be the syllabus? What should be the medium of education? What are the ways and means to end corporal punishment? How to ensure that male teachers inclined to child molestation or harassment of female students do get caught and adequately punished? A plethora of questions, populist and or intellectual fragmented discourse takes place at different forums and levels. These are all relevant and all conscious citizens of Pakistan must contribute towards the cause of promoting education. However, to me this cannot be achieved until and unless there is a serious and sincere contemplation on the state and status of teachers especially school teachers in Pakistan. Who becomes a school teacher in Pakistan? Several reports are available on this issue.

Teaching is one of the most challenging jobs. Tragically, usually lowly qualified and at times, even unqualified individuals become school teachers in Pakistan and that too under compulsion and not as a choice. At higher levels of academia recruitments and promotions are based on personal favouritism and a biased quota system which is originally instituted to offer level playing field to the disadvantaged ones. Most of the backbenchers of my different classrooms have ended as school and, even as college teachers.

Even if one tends to ignore this aspect and feed hope in human potential and welcome the backbenchers cohort of teachers the problem remains unsettled. The next larger than life question is the status of teacher in our society? A well-qualified university teacher certainly gets more respect than a poorly qualified school teacher but what they share in common may be in varying degrees due to individual circumstances and specific class attributes is the lack of power.

Sadly our people get easily convinced by crude parade of power and cornucopia and questioning the means of these assets is no longer considered a bona fide query or at least a judicious one.

Generally all those professionals and technical experts who want to survive and excel in this country in all fields including academia either suffer from psychological traumas and or rivalries. The wiser ones at some point leave this land or at least want their children escape an undeserved life.

I remember my days in a medical college in Punjab, Pakistan, where progenies and relatives of military Generals, industrialists and Parliamentarians used to get VVIP treatment and very few like me were not only ridiculed but treated dishonourably in many respects.

As somebody who has faced that “little house on the prairie” kind of moments, the sense of being immensely low; I strictly believe that change will happen only when administration and management of academia, legislators, sitting ministers and popular journalists would be

trained to honour teachers, artists, writers, musicians and all talented and hardworking but rankles people and give respect (not undue favours) to their talented children and disseminate the same through their policy and practice.

Though at this stage of my life I feel rigorously tattered, my most of the dreams are hitherto alive and unscratched as can be verified by my endless romance with life. I still believe in the power of youth—skilled and intellectually sound youth and have faith in the fairy story of democracy.

I look forward to the day when the daughter of a skilled person say a *Tabla* player or a working single mother enters a professional college on merit ( not on any quota) and her peers and teachers would see her and likes as the pride of their respective institution. This would make all those spoiled brats (who gained good marks either due to heavy and expensive private tuitions and or nepotism) from conventionally high profile families feel lonely and embarrassed and they would (hopefully) realize that they can only be respected when they will have their own strengths.

I am afraid that Burka Avenger and Malala centered funds and activism can only command attention and appreciation from certain groups of social media warriors, non-profits, donors etc. and some would benefit from such actions in the form of awards, scholarships, foreign trips and fame but the vast majority of Pakistan would continue to suffer because of the strait laced class systems, lack of-collective courage to diagnose illnesses in our systems, selective accountability

and openness , illiteracy and low quality education.

I do not live in dreams but my dreams about Pakistan are even now spirited. I dream of a Pakistan where the wretched of the earth do not have to compromise on their self-esteem and dignity with charity system (even in a landmark idea like Danish schools) to get quality education but could find their due place in the elite academia and where they do not make headlines like “slum dog goes to Harvard” but would be mentioned as honour to the institutions of Ivy leagues who receive them. I dream of the day when ministry of education would be the most sought out slot by the mighty ones with good intentions and reasons.

The state of education in Pakistan cannot be changed without changing the status of education and all influencing factors. This is not mutually exclusive. Education for all cannot happen if all human, material and monetary resources are not invested in that cause on emergency basis.

Until and unless we as a society and nation learn to prioritize education through visible Pakistan oriented policy, actions and activism, persuade our best brains to adopt teaching as a calling, respect all forms of dignified labour and skills, genuinely confer regard to our dedicated teachers and mentors and do not get dazzled by certain surnames we cannot see the substance called change.

The preconditions fated for a change that all oppressed secretly desire but cannot by and large define are only offered in an equal, unrestricted,

classless, no fatalist and uncensored society. Are we ready to transform our officially welfare and Islamic state into an egalitarian one?

*The writer is an activist and a dreamer!*

**Published in The Spokesman. Tuesday, 13 August  
2013**

# **Disability Is Not Absence of Ability**

*What needs to be clearly understood is that the disability is not the absence of ability. It is a social construction by the self-styled custodians of power and prestige.*

A Pakistani society where disabled people (from all sexes and classes) can claim equitable space in public and professional lives is yet a distant dream. As such there is no one universal definition of disability but a widely accepted one interprets disabled person as the one who, on account of an injury, disease or congenital deformity, is handicapped to perform certain tasks, undertake gainful employment or profession and hence includes persons who are visually and auditory impaired and physically and or mentally disabled.

What needs to be clearly understood is that the disability is not the absence of ability. It is a social construction by the self-styled custodians of power and prestige. Thus it remains as one of the most misunderstood human conditions and positions in unjust societies like ours that have little if any respect for powerless, disadvantaged and unprivileged communities.

According to the World Programme of Action concerning disabled persons the consequences of deficiencies and disablement are particularly serious for women. Generally women are subjected to social, cultural and economic

disadvantages, making it more difficult for them to take part in community life.

Thus it is apparent that being physically challenged or disabled is not amusing anywhere in the world. However, just as being poor in Pakistan and being poor in Europe, US, or other developed parts of the world has a much different connotation and cost it remains an undisputed statement that being disabled in Pakistan constructs a special set of problems, that too with class and gender variations due to inherent ability of our social and governance systems to create access to architectural and attitudinal barriers and complicate simple issues and *vice versa*.

Heartrending could be the politest word that can be used to comment on casual approach towards information about disabilities and disabled country in a country that has faced severe natural disasters in last 7-8 years.

The dearth of data, rather absence of data in public records about disabled people also reflects insensitivity towards the issue of disability at the State level. In humanitarian settings (I have personally witnessed it when I was in many of the affected areas after earthquake in 2005 and floods in 2010 and 2011), the absence of age and sex disaggregated information further jeopardize the quandary of disabled people.

This melancholy translates into anxiety when empathetic researchers and development practitioners find outsized mismatch in the legislation and policy frameworks for the disabled and the prevailing truth or ground realities. In the wake of the United Nation's year of Disabled in

1981, Pakistan enacted the Disabled Persons (Employment and Rehabilitation) Ordinance 1981 for the benefit of disabled persons.

Pakistan also has a National Policy for Persons with Disabilities (2002) and National Plan of Action (2006). The country signed Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), and its Optional Protocol on 25 September 2008; and Ratified Convention on 5 July 2011. The Pakistan Persons with Disabilities Act 2008 and the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act 2008 are currently being formulated (Pakistan 2009). In 2012 the Sindh assembly has passed this bill.

According to the official records this legislation primarily provides guidelines and sets out implementation policies, including those previously adopted by NGOs. The Ordinance established the National Council and Provincial Councils whose main tasks are to formulate and implement policies. Oversight rests with the National Council. The primary focus lies on government administered disability assessment, job referral system, employment exchange, and training/rehabilitation programs partly funded through a tax levied on employers for not meeting the hiring quota. Covered are employers with more than 100 employees. The provisions of the Ordinance govern employment and rehabilitation, training, funding, and administrative processes.

In actuality, disabled people are not only subjected to subtle forms of discrimination and stigmatization at individual and collective levels

but there are unabashed kinds of unfairness towards the people with disabilities.

One does not need to conduct an in-depth research study to identify these inequalities and injustices. All one needs is to just take a pause and look around with compassion and understanding. One will find that here are roads with no special arrangement for them, traffic signals do not support visually impaired, nearly all buildings even in big cities including many academic institutions, technical and aid agencies do not have provision of ramp, most of the web sites by the public, private and non-profit organizations are not disabled friendly.

In a society that was systemically made retarded in terms of intellectual growth in the dark regime of the military dictator Zia and that is currently characterized by terrorists, bigots, educated ones in leadership positions reluctant to revisit centuries old traditions and power structure supporting religious interpretations; there are rare if any avenues of entertainment in public spaces.

In a stifling scenario where the rich and mighty can follow any code of conduct in their private and public lives; where the poor have yet to be entitled to any entertainment and middle class have yet to reclaim morality in the pleasure, it becomes almost unimaginable that the disabled especially those from poor and middle classes in general and women and girls in particular experience extra brunt on mind, body, heart and soul.

Amidst the mushroom growth of no profits only a handful of NGOs are trying to ease out the

difficulties of disabled people in Pakistan. Gender, over the years has evolved as funding puller thematic area but gender perspectives in the area of disability with the consciousness of local realities are yet to be cracked in Pakistan.

Broadly speaking the usual level of vigilance even among the duty bearers on International normative framework on women and girls with disabilities is much less than the required.

As a perpetual awakened dreamer activist as well, I hope and pray that our media would give due importance to long neglected issues of people with disabilities and that too with gender sensitivity and responsiveness. This cannot happen in a vacuum. Not only those in the corridors of power have to internalize the fact that they are public representatives and that too of an economically poor nation and not fashion icons but also a paradigm shift in the editorial policies is needed. Enthusiastic young journalists must be trained to frame the right questions and dare to go beyond in-depth analysis of appearance and accessories of women legislators.

The need of the hour is to take speedy steps for including the disabled people and their issues in mainstream development initiatives and discourse rather than legitimizing their traditional exclusion in socio-economically and political realms within the hollow context of special needs for special people.

It is needless to emphasize the urgent need of legislation on mainstreaming the rights of the disabled people.

*The writer is a gender and social development  
expert based in Islamabad*

**Published in The Spokesman, Monday, 10 June  
2013**

# **Gender Mainstreaming: Just a Myth or a Reality?**

*Anti-women practices, policies and preachings are prevalent in Pakistan despite some pro- women activism, legislation and advocacy.*

It was indeed a pleasant surprise to see NA 44 FATA appearing as the "breaking news" on March 31, 2013, and the reason behind this first time privilege was none other Badam Zari, the 38 year old Bajour Agency's resident, home maker turned independent electoral candidate who wanted to work for the women of FATA with the conviction that "Men in Bajour generally respect women". Then followed a 70 year old but enthusiastic widow Gulana Bibi, who vowed to put up a fight with a MQM party ticket, in Tank, the home of Maulna Fazlur Rehman,. Nusrat Bibi from Lower Dir, originally a member of PTI, disappointed on not getting a party ticket dared to contest as an independent candidate. Another Nusrat Begum stood up as an independent candidate in Mardan against mighty Hotis.

This all was coming from tribal belt and KP. Most of Pakistanis know rather too well that how world looks at these regions. KP stands out in some other respects as well. For instance it has the worst record in centre-province relationship, law and order situation, unemployment rate since the creation of Pakistan. Therefore, irrespective of the underlying reasons, whether these women decided their political pathways independently or were influenced by men in their families and or

immediate communities what was noticed is the vim and valour of Pashtun women. These women brought sighs of relief among the liberals and progressives and mere sighs to the otherwise at least for a few days prior to the Elections 2013.

As someone who was specifically interested in knowing the degree of inclusion of women and their issues in the election with a special focus on conflict zones of Pakistan (though these are not officially declared as the conflict zones), I began to see my own optimism being gradually replaced by taints of cynicism if not pure disillusionment.

The catalyst to this response was the open threat of Taliban to three main stream political parties—thus depriving them of the level playing field before election. It was therefore not at all surprising to read that Gulana Bibi withdrew her nomination and ANP decided to hold corner meetings instead of Jalsa to save lives. What was surprising is the absence of articulation of women's' issue and promises for their advancement among right and left or perceived right and left political parties.

In some of the heavily donor funded five star hotels based pre-election seminars that I attended I failed to understand the failure of the concerned ones to rehabilitate inhabitants of Jallozai camp, protection of the resident women and girls of this camp and at least acceptance of the fact that inhumane conditions leading to psychosomatic disorders are prevalent there. Similar I noticed with shock the absence of voices on the need to provide enabling environment to women voters and women in media in harsh geographical and cultural terrains of FCR and

FATA and the casual responses of intelligent media" men" and many renowned CSO representatives (operating from Islamabad).

A day before the election I came to know through my sources that an agreement had been materialized in lower Dir to bar women from casting vote. I also noticed an email on the same issued by a renowned activist. While I was thinking of sharing my information with a group of human and women rights activists I came across a long e mail from a Pashtun woman rights activist , a politician as well as the head of an NGO suggesting effectively that this news is baseless. Knowing in the light of my past experiences that Pashtun nationalism is very strong and perhaps some of their firebrand activists do not like a non-Pashtun like me to talk about them I remained silent. I knew it would be fatal for me to act as more loyal than the king. On 12 May '13, I finally got hold of the copy of the written agreement which I shared with key networks of CSOs and rights based activist. Geo TV "broke" the news that very evening and in the following days almost all TV channels and newspapers talked about it.

As expected, a majority of the frontline activists and networks of CSOs become suddenly active. Soon another agreement of similar nature was found from upper Dir. Civil society mainly donor driven has limited capacity of looking at the problems with its own lens and it chooses its battles carefully- hence I was neither shocked nor surprised at the response, non-response and reaction of the mainstream NGOs and renowned activists.

Anti-women practices, policies and preaching are prevalent in Pakistan despite some pro women activism, legislation and advocacy.

As if all this was not enough to damage the interests of a vast majority of ordinary women across the country in general and in conflict areas of tribal belt and KP, all of a sudden the magic recipe for peace was discovered. In this post-election 2013 "new Pakistan", the talk of the town is talk with Taliban. PTI and PML-N want to give peace a chance through negotiations with these terrorists.

I am neither a popular TV anchor nor an expensive consultant and political analyst: therefore I refrain from commenting on the selective naivety of the new leadership in Pakistan and making any intelligent or unintelligent guesses about the outcome of these negotiations. However, being a non-elite self-made Pakistani woman, I am a qualified non-specialist to put forward a suggestion.

If you all mighty men are determined to talk with Taliban. Kindly include at least two mothers who are still surviving the loss of their loved ones and seeing amputees around on daily basis with no place to seek hope.

*The Writer is a gender specialist and researcher based in Islamabad.*

**Published in The Spokesman. Wednesday, 05 June 2013**

# **My Sheroes from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa**

*I have taken a risk of being misjudged by certain liberals by quoting Ms. Malala Yousufzai and Ms. Mukhtaran Mai, but I have done it with the hope to command the attention of those who matter so that my sheroes may get some relief if not compensation, foreign visas, etc. though I understand that the probability of earning personal attacks is much higher than the former.*

Today I am going to introduce two girls from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, who have become my sheroes since 2012. Those of you who are conversant with them should take my introduction as a reintroduction. They did get attention in the press but for a very short period. Neither their magnitude of miseries nor the degree of their resilience were duly acknowledged. Their real strengths were never put in the right perspective. They never caught the attention of the international community and they are not in the limelight for reasons, best known to the movers and shakers in the industry of media, politics, child rights & women rights based non-profits and donors including UN agencies. I am sharing their stories with an integration of empathy and facts.

My first shero is 'Wajeeha'. She is living with courage and every day she demonstrates self-esteem. She is now 11 years old. She lives in one of the most conservative areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa that is known as Tangea, in district

Charsaddah and works' though International laws do not allow her to work. I read about her in an esteemed English daily as the country's first female rickshaw driver implying that she drives a vehicle with six persons aboard. She has to remain culturally correct as well so she drives while wrapping herself in a Chaadar/shawl. Is not it ironical that she was showcased as the youngest Pakistani and probably only rickshaw driver (as if she is doing this as a show to be acknowledged by the Guinness book of world record?). Her father, a Frontier Core veteran lost his both legs while fighting against militants in Swat and who somehow decided to buy a 3-wheeler rickshaw instead of contacting any foreign and or local media to fight with his new circumstances. She was 9 years old then and she decided on her own to support her father and her family.

She goes to school as well and like world renowned Ms.Malala Yosufzai (age 16 years), our girl from Swat, a Nobel peace prize nominee- who has made us all anti-Taliban Pakistanis proud, this little wizard too is a lover of education. Her name is '*Wajeaha*' literally meaning beautiful. Indeed you are a beautiful person within and without. I hope and pray for a beautiful life for you in future.

Following are some verses by renowned feminist Pakistani poet Ms. Kishwar Naheed from her poem 'we sinful women'. "It is we sinful women who are not awed by the grandeur of those who wear gowns, who don't sell our bodies, who don't bow our heads, who don't fold our hands together."

Meet Ms.Uzma Ayub from Karak of Southern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Karak is said to be the single district in Pakistan which is inhabited by only one tribe of Pashtun, the Khattak. Karak is one of the most literate districts in the province and the Khattaks are considered most literate and most liberal among Pashtuns. I am refraining from drawing any iota of attention towards PTI and its chief Minister in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as my story is about Uzma.

At the tender age of 15, she was abducted and gang- raped allegedly by policemen. She got pregnant and I learnt through e-activism that “she wants to retain the child, pro-life advocates won and instead of observing a confidential therapeutic abortion, all tycoons of private TV Channels adopted an unwritten policy of turning their cameras to the pregnant victim. A strong imagination is needed to visualise the journey of this girl and her poor family in the given contexts of conservatism, absence of rule of law and culture of victim-bashing. Despite threats she managed to seek legal aid. But it had cost her 24 years old brother got killed in outside premises of the court in 2011 on 10 December (ironically the International Human Rights day). She gave birth to a girl in 2012 and that time she became camera delight and her nightmare was then newsworthy. Finally she failed to seek justice from the court because the ‘DNA” did not match with the alleged party and it is obvious that Justice is blind and works through evidence. According to a published report by Equality Now, ‘The court found that the DNA test results of Uzma’s baby did not match the men implicated in the gang-rape. In addition,

it ordered Uzma to undergo multiple lie detector tests and found the results inconclusive.”

This however is not relevant how evidence is provided, lost and/or manipulated. My several queries directed at many concerned human rights activists, ending violence against women and girls forums remain unanswered or the responses were unsatisfactory (at least my limited pragmatism could not accept those answers). Following initial ceremonial gestures from the civil society and public sector no attention is being paid to this courageous but unfortunate girl. This girl is my *shero* because she is a super “failure.” *Mukhtaran Mai* of Jatoi, Southern Punjab, Pakistan and the internationally recognized victim turned survivor of gang rape also could not seek justice from the court but at least she made the world weep for her and sought material and monetary support. But my *sheroe* is.....!

My civilian salutes to both of you .You are among the very few genuinely bravest kid girls I happened to know. Even though, to me courage is something that is within and it does not need support of media, Facebook likes, NGOS’ support, street activism and ceremonial gestures etc. etc. I still get puzzled and pessimistic on fathoming your suffering.

I have taken a risk of being misjudged by certain liberals by quoting Ms. Malala Yousufzai and Ms. Mukhtaran Mai, but I have done it with the hope to command the attention of those who matter so that my sheroes may get some relief if not compensation, foreign Visas, etc. though I

understand that the probability of earning personal attacks is much higher than the former.

However, I would not hide my failure to understand the difference in the fate of victims? I do not want to involve God in such matters but does this mean that one has to be “lucky” even in mishaps and tragedies especially if someone is from a society that is characterized by silence on violence and selective activism and a State that has yet to assign priorities to such issues and ensure that adequate laws, effective systems and incessant rule of law are in place?

*The writer is a gender expert and activist*

**Published in The Spokesman, Friday, 05 July 2013**

# **Please Ban Dowry Mr. Prime Minister**

*Dowry- the custom in the Islamic republic of Pakistan is a thriving yet unacknowledged form of social injustice, which qualifies as crime, abuse and violence.*

Each year, in South Asian communities, thousands of young brides lose their lives over dowry disputes. They are burnt, killed or maimed by husbands and in-laws whose material demands remain unfulfilled. Religions including Islam have always been interpreted and applied in favour of men and power structures. Thus, it is not surprising to notice that dowry is prevalent in Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and Nepal - the patriarchal belt of Asia. This patriarchal oppression as mentioned by the renowned Egyptian feminist activist and scholar, Dr. Nawal El Saadawi, which has led to the oppression of women, has been caused by ignorance of the true teachings of Islam.

Despite having highest rankings on inequalities, confusions and contradictions, the Constitution of this Islamic Republic has significant human rights content. Any citizen (civilians included) can move any court, which has the relevant jurisdiction, in case his/her fundamental rights are infringed. In practice, these avenues of recourse are not accessible to all citizens equally because of the low level of literacy, particularly legal literacy, and the lack of awareness of one's rights. Approaching the

judiciary through a lawyer is expensive in terms of time, effort and finances.

In Pakistan, the conflict between State law and customary, tribal law has been resolved: with the former mimicking the latter, the two are now practically in congruence with each other. This concord between law and custom on the place of women in this society is being consolidated in its courts.

Overwhelmingly male, the justices who sit in judgment, predictably, adhere to the acid test of patriarchy and are predisposed to give men the benefit of the doubt in cases involving the murder, rape, and physical abuse of women as well as in cases where women are accused of Zina (Extramartial sex includes both adultery and fornication).

Dowry the custom in the Islamic republic of Pakistan is a thriving yet unacknowledged form of social injustice, which qualifies as crime, abuse and violence. In one of my studies in 2002, following an analysis of 30 days of newspapers (Pakistani) coverage, it was revealed that out of 206 news clips on different issues of violence against women, only 23 reflected any aspect of dowry. The study further pointed out that not only the married girls or those in the marriageable age experienced some form of exploitation, abuse or violence because of the customary practice of dowry, but the fathers of such daughters, the brothers of such sisters and the families in general are the sufferers. There is no mechanism to document the dowry-based violence cases that could help the institutions for further processing the issue. There is no statistics to measure dowry

violence in society. It also shows that dowry violence is not considered seriously in the Pakistani context and is always considered as a part of social customs and norms.

While conducting a pioneering study “Forgotten—Dowry A Socially endorsed form of violence in Pakistan” in 2009, I explored that several thousand cases of bride-burning have been reported in Pakistan. The Ansar Burney Trust International says that in some cases, accidents are engineered (such as tampering with a kitchen stove to cause the victim’s death) or the victims are set ablaze, and the attack is disguised as an accident or as suicide. According to an Amnesty International report in 1999, though 1,600 “bride-burning” cases were reported, only sixty were prosecuted and just two resulted in conviction. That very study also unveiled that a growing number of girls have started staying unmarried in Pakistan as parents don’t have enough money to meet the ‘demands’ of the groom’s family. The custom for an increasingly elaborate dowry is set by the people who do not even need a dowry from the girls in order to ‘run their homes’ or ‘support’ the grooms in any way. There are certain factors that ensure the continuity of the practice of dowry, such as:

- It is considered an incentive to lure a more suitable match.
- It is submission to the demand of a perceived suitable match.
- It is used as an excuse for denial of inheritance to women (the expenses on dowry and wedding are unilaterally decided by the men of the

family as transfer of inheritance by other means). It is considered a good support mechanism to help the new couple so that they get a convenient start in practical life.

- It has become a socially enforced practice that is followed and executed ‘with a smile’, notwithstanding how painful it could be to the family.
- Obligatory *Jahez* takes a heavy toll on the family of the bride.

The actors in dowry violence are men and women who are participants in local, regional or national cultures, in religious and social-traditional and yet current and contemporary normative orders that are in the process of being constantly tested and modified.

Dowry demand, dowry acceptance, dowry offering and lavish wedding are not only proxy indicators of the deteriorating mental health and moral standards of our society but the payment of dowry is a rejection of Islamic values and a violation of the 1976 Dowry and Bridal Gift (Restriction) Act as well [1]. This can appear an alarm to only those who have respect for the law and believe in rule of law (side comment: more than 12% of our legislators do not have NTN). The Act fixed the upper limit of Rs. 5,000 for dowry and Rs. 2,000 as maximum expenditure on meals at a marriage ceremony. Nobody adhered to the legally prescribed upper limit in Pakistan and dowry continued as an essential part in every social stratum. But, interestingly, the same upper limit of Rs. 5,000 was used by the groom’s side at the time of divorce suits filed to recover dowry.

Since the upper limit could not exceed Rs. 5,000, the groom's side was not legally bound to pay the rest. There have been many instances of women being deprived of their dowry after divorce as a consequence of legal misinterpretation.

The relevant enactments in Pakistan are the Dowry and Bridal Gift (Restriction) Act, 1976, plus rules made under that act, and the Dowry and Bridal Gift (Restriction) (Amendment) Ordinance, 1980. There is no published specific research on these statutes, but there is a considerable and growing list of decided and reported cases. In 1997, Pakistan has taken further interesting steps to control the inflated expenditure on marriage celebrations by passing Marriage Prohibition of Wasteful Expenses Act, 1997, which did have the effect of bringing many food expenses under control. In 1993, the Pakistan Law Commission recommended amending and updating the 1976 Act and suggested the limit for dowry to be increased to Rs. 50,000 for urban areas and Rs. 20,000 for rural areas. The wedding expenditure was, however, raised to Rs. 25,000 in the urban and Rs.10,000 in the rural areas. The law continued to be flouted, and in 2003 the Law Commission again announced that it was preparing a draft law on Marriage and Expenses, Dowry and Bridal Gift (Restriction) Act, 2003, to replace the 1976 Act.

Efforts made by the mushrooming CSO sector with regard to dowry can be categorized as disappointing. There had been localized and limited efforts by small-scale welfare societies in the 1960s and 1970s aimed at awareness-raising, as also motivation campaigns to convince people

at the *Mohalla* level to resist the mindless following of dowry demands.

However, with the advent of international donors in the 1980s, the CSOs in Pakistan either undertook campaigns against other more visibly anti-women oppressive mechanisms like the *Hudood* ordinance or political marginalization under the Zia regime. Of late also, the CSOs have taken up issues of expressed violence, thus being merely symptomatic, and not delving into the deep-rooted causes of violence against women – dowry being one primary cause.

SACHET a multi-dimensional national non-profit that I cofounded organized and led the first-ever national consultation on marriage expenses and a legislation on dowry in Pakistan in July 2003 in collaboration with the Commission on Law and Justice. The Commission drafted a new bill (though SACHET & other CSO that were part of the consultation had reservations on its endorsement of the dowry practice) was presented to the Senate and approved for presentation before the National Assembly. The National Assembly/ies till to date had been unable to debate it. Meanwhile, the then PML (Q) woman parliamentarian now a PML-N front line leader & parliamentarian, Ms. Marvi Memon, presented a private member's bill on dowry violence, inheritance law and acid attacks in 2009 as a result of advocacy FADAN (Fight against Dowry Advocacy Network).

The government of Nawaz Sharif in the mid-1990s had introduced an ordinance banning grand wedding receptions (an implicit upshot of dowry). However, that was enforced for a short

time only. Mian Shabaz Sharif, on becoming Chief Minister of Punjab, following the election in 2008, fortunately restored the ban on lavish wedding meals in Punjab that had been lifted by the National Assembly during Gen. (retd.) Musharaff's regime (Oct.1999-August 2007).

I hope and pray that the current government of Mian Nawaz Sharif should be able to look at bill for Prohibiting Excessive Expenditure on Marriage Ceremony and Dowry and build a Pakistan that is free of at least this curse and crime that is endorsed socially and that remains buried in the sanctity of family matter.

*The writer is a dowry victim turned survivor & founder  
Fight Against Dowry Advocacy Network*

**Published in The Spokesman, Monday, 06 January 2014**

# **The ‘Idiot Box’ is Challenging Times and Changing Values**

*I have watched more than a dozen of Pakistani TV dramas of different genres on different TV channels in the last 15 months and I clearly observed what those plays communicated. They communicated glorification of polygamy and incest.*

What is “the literature of the illiterate, the culture of the low-brow, the wealth of the poor, the privilege of the underprivileged and the executive club of the excluded masses”? This is none else but the Television and these attributes were ascribed to it way back in 1996 by Lee Lovinger as quoted in a book “about television” by Martin Prager Mayer a famous fiction writer’ that was published in 1972.

Nothing seems to remain personal now. Television has infested our private spheres. Ironically or interestingly TV influences our personal priorities, conduct and choices. Luckily very few of us are conscious that we have been caged by this ‘idiot box’. The truth of the day is that the society is also mirroring what is shown on TV rather than the other way round even in a country like ours that is studded with income and intellectual poverty. The morality of media has been questioned around the world but a discourse that is clearly distinct from merely a

knee jerk response is yet to take off in the present day Pakistan.

Not only mesmerizing corporatorized God Slot shows and breakfast TV but a sizeable number of spicy and salacious current affairs programs are also continuously contributing towards damaging the collective psyche of our masses and are redefining the measures of success. However, the most expensive form of television is the Television drama.

A substantial part of TV transmission on most of the mainstream big and private TV channels consists of dramas. These dramas which can be costume drama, teen drama have tragedy, comic (dramedy) or a mix and are presented as series, serials and soaps. Even in the biggest broadcasting channels of UK and US, Drama is the form of television which attracts the largest regular audiences. Television drama is the most expensive form of television. The average cost for US drama is more like \$2 – 5 million per hour. British drama such as Dr Who (60 mins) costs about a £1 million per hour. Though no such statistics are available in relation to Pakistani TV dramas but there is no reason not to believe that they are dictating norms and traditions to its viewers mostly young people and women. According to the BBC's controller of fiction Jane Tranter says it is TV drama that now "gives our lives meaning and shape" rather than literature.

The new age of TV drama in Pakistan has no doubt revived the golden age of drama on TV that was once reserved only for the plays of state owned and restrictive PTV only when it used to be the only TV channel in Pakistan. With the

influx of new TV channels became visible the mushrooming of dramas. Not only new ideas and individuals are becoming part of the TV dramas besides providing livelihood to a number of support and technical members of the crew (including those who were looking for work following a nearly dead film industry if it was an industry at all) but several new trends have also been also introduced.

New TV dramas, irrespective of their hefty production costs, plentiful high ratings and large business revenues never fail to elevate subordination by apparently beautiful and brainy emancipated women heroines before an abusive but exceedingly handsome and rich heroes or endorsement of stereotypes like a monstrous mother-in-law, etc. Though these crazy characters do merit a discussion, I am limiting myself to a specific leaning that might be covert or overt.

This trend is about eulogizing certain feelings and relationships which are or supposedly disregarded in Muslim and non-Muslim cultures and subcultures. Admittedly these existed, and are existing. I have watched more than a dozen of Pakistani TV dramas of different genres on different TV channels in the last 15 months and I clearly observed what those plays communicated. They communicated glorification of polygamy and incest.

A number of plays and situations depicted as protagonists the young girls, usually from lower socio-economic strata, getting attracted to a well settled handsomely ageing man or the man being fed up by his beautiful, rich and outspoken wife

getting attracted to a docile and younger woman who is either his subordinate in the office set up or works as his domestic help.

I failed to understand the logic of this entire scenario and who told our play writers and directors that all those women who are educated and well off are repellent for their husbands. Why do they not simply tell through their marvellous storytelling skill that men are usually promiscuous and they get attracted to tender looks and firmer bodies? Why do they not warn young girls not to adopt a short cut for gaining wealth and status?

Incest: yes this exists in our society but might sound strange to many of the readers. What is questionable is the treatment of the issue in TV dramas. Try to recall those plays where two real sisters are falling for the same men. This is nothing but incest and dramas should be loud and clear on this regarding the position of Islam on this situation. Either TV dramas should refrain from such plots or the writer or director should have the capacity to take care of this with cultural appropriateness and religious correctness.

I wish that more courage and creativity like the one reflected in Indian film Monsoon wedding and first ever PTV drama (Rahe Naam Allah Ka written by Muhammad Ahmed) on the issue of incest between a father and his step daughter would be seen on TV dramas to highlight the curse of a tabooed subject –incest. This trauma is experienced by many young girls in our society through fathers, brothers, uncles (real and step both) and even fathers and brothers in law.

However being romantically involved with the same guy of two real sisters, though possible but it is not at all tolerable.

I understand that some of my colleagues who are revered as true liberals would frown if they happen to see these lines of mine because they deliberate that any adult relationship that is consensual is a private and unobjectionable matter though they always fall short to respond to my queries regarding human rights and shattering of the grieved party (for instance the abandoned or current wife who has to witness the relationship of her husband with her daughter, sister or niece). Perhaps I always fail to transfer empathy in such dialogues.

I believe that I am a liberal who respects and support personal freedoms but with responsibility. I believe that it is the responsibility of a mass medium like TV in private and public sectors to broadcast infomercials on menstrual hygiene and contraception as well.

What needs to be examined is the quality of message? As a side comment but a pertinent one, it is worthwhile to recall the recent ban on an advert of condom that has raised voices of protest and praise both. That particular advertisement not only was failing to convey the clear message that a condom is a male contraceptive that saves a woman from many side effects of female contraceptives besides protecting both partners from probable transmission of Hepatitis B & C and HIV-AIDS but also seriously damaged the credibility of the message by showing a woman model who is perceived beautiful for all wrong reasons in our hypocritical society. Since clarity,

communication of benefits and credibility are inevitable requirements of an effective communication, therefore in spite of being a pro contraception commercial, I am against any discreditable and garish infomercial about condom.

Human beings no doubt are imperfect but imperfections when aired must be revealed as blemishes and must not be overestimated. I am finding such a portrayal of women in relationships, such a vivid promotion of vulgarity and negative masculinisation not only against human dignity and self-esteem but distasteful and disagreeable. A line has to be drawn between being liberal and being lewd.

An academic Marxist philosopher and writer on communication, Professor Emeritus Dr. Helena once wrote that no analysis of television, any more than any other medium, can be complete or right without an analysis of the political economy of its production, distribution and reception. All media are shaped by the general character of the social order and by the particular character of each medium's relationship to specific States and market forces. The European tradition of public service broadcasting has produced a very different sort of television from the American system of commercial domination based on the free play of market forces. The gap may be closing, against public service broadcasting, but something still remains.

In a hinterland of illiteracy, many harmful cultural traditions and retardation of intellectual growth, the Islamic republic of Pakistan has to

demarcate the social order and the eccentricity of market forces as well as their acceptability.

**Published in The Spokesman, Thursday, 15 August 2013**

# **The Euphoria about Women Emancipation**

*Betrayed by my own optimism and faith in the outcome of awareness, advocacy and activism, I sincerely believe that it is better to revisit some of the inconvenient truths. The truth remains that political and electoral processes are governed by unseen but not unknown forces that want to continue to work in the wider 'national interests'.*

The very creation of Pakistan is viewed as a miracle. And miracles are materializing in this land of the pure since its inception. Periodically they are masked as military command, or sham democracy, or as a mixed platter of democracy lovers and khakis etc. My motherland witnesses crimes, injustices, extremes of poverty, overt and covert forms of abuses and violence against girls, women and communities of faith ranging from mainstream Sunnis, Salafis Islam etc. on a daily basis. Ironically despite hearing about the tall claims, all such perpetrators manage to skip the proverbial long arm of the law and live another day to torment us all again and again. What we as commoners are left to hear or see on our private TV channels is breaking news screaming in red colours that “after killing of some x number of people by unknown miscreants the situation has reverted to normal in the city (Namaloom Afraad Ki Janib Sey X Afrad Qatl Honay K Baad Shehar Mein Surate Haal Mamool Per Agaiee Hay”) and so on and so forth.

Year 2013 is being termed as historic (ironically history has always been *his story as her story* has mostly has been stolen, hidden and or distorted by political historians) as the country has seen for the very first time completion of a democratic government, transition of power and holding of general election. An ideal election is supposed to be free and fair. Was it so in Pakistan? My answer is “no”.

This response has very little derivation either from the incidents of violence on the day of election in different parts of the country (Balochistan included) or from the statements of EU observers that some irregularities and rigging took place which affected the transparency of the polling process. It has nothing to do with the saga of hordes of multi-donor millions dollar funded nongovernmental organizations that is taking dramatic twists.

As a socially conscious but non elite citizen (or subject?!) of this country I never even imagined that the country can afford a free and fair election. The reason is simple. In a country where there is no level playing field, where affirmative action is also cleverly manipulated in favour of the perpetually privileged ones and where most of the laws and lawmakers too are prejudiced, how one should expect an election that endows opportunities to people especially women with no means to influence power politics.

If self-deception is a form of therapy than there is no harm to remain in so many illusions created by many of the private and social media houses. Similarly if looking at matters without depth is a smarter way of living than it is

absolutely justified to believe in the gains for women of Pakistan in the guise of nearly seven pro-women legislations, BISP, visibility of more young women in media etc. as evidence of women empowerment in Pakistani systems, society, culture and sub-cultures.

But it is also worthwhile at least for a moment to take notice of the inescapable and intrinsic realities and facts in the political arena that ultimately have an impact on this land of 180 M out of which 49% “lives” in multidimensional poverty.

A reliable if not precise proxy indicator to measure the said impact could be to catch a sight of the women and men who finally get into the assemblies where they are supposed to raise voice for the poor, for the abused and for the disadvantaged? According to unofficial results announced by Election Commission of Pakistan, 14 women were successful in General Elections 2013 by winning five National and nine Provincial assembly seats. The bios and political journeys of most of these 14 would be an attention-grabbing read but certainly not as spine-tingling as most of the male parliamentarians have. So what are the choices for those people especially women who want to live and work in Pakistan and that too as self-made ones and without seeking the concessions of being a woman?

Betrayed by my own optimism and faith in the outcome of awareness, advocacy and activism. I sincerely believe that it is better to revisit some of the inconvenient truths. The truth remains that political and electoral processes are governed by unseen but not unknown forces that want to

continue to work in the wider 'national interests'. The fact remains that not only right winged (who are seen as endorsing anti women practices and policies), the liberals and seculars and claimants of change, all entered into an alliance to bar women from voting in lower and upper Dir (there may be other areas yet to be revealed for instance in Laliani village in Sargodha, Punjab, where women never cast their votes and same tradition continued). Women with intellect only but without the push of the class did not succeed in getting even party tickets and women who went to the polling stations mostly followed the willingness of the head of the family while exercising "their choice". It would be a great mistake for the political pundits to equate enthusiasm and turnout of women as their attainment of rights and elevation of status.

Non elites and especially women have only two choices; either to continue to enjoy the convenience of subordination or be ready to pay the cost of empowerment.

**Published in The Spokesman, Tuesday, 18 June 2013**

# To Be or Not To Be

*What is the degree and duration of empowerment for women in the military and that too in combat ones? I am not aware of set of rules regarding women in frontline in military of Pakistan but my desk review could not find any committee on gender perspectives like the one NATO has.*

Let me begin with a confession right at the onset- for the first time in my twenty years of work and activism on different dimensions of gender and as someone who always advocate the inclusion and acknowledgment of women and girls in non-traditional sectors, I am clearly confused now.

The origin of this confusion lies in my diverse experiences in South Asia and training in some European academia in the areas of peace building and conflict resolution. However, the symptomatic manifestation of my 'clear confusion' owes its existence to an excellent story by Reuters about Pakistan's first combat-ready woman fighter pilot, 26 years old Ms. Ayesha Farooque.

When I read the story I instantly felt very proud of her and the influx of newsfeed on my face book pages that shared the link of this story made me convinced that this is the epic of empowerment for a woman in Pakistan in general and specially for women/girls from humble backgrounds in our class studded society where absence of merit is normative. This was followed

by the photos of the first Afghan woman pilot in their Air force.

My analytical mind refused to remain in the suddenly emerged ecstatic state not only because my piercing eyes noticed that a good number of the comments on social media were focused on the tender appearance of woman fighter pilots but also because of the flight of my inquisitive mind in some harsher terrains of analysis.

What I comprehended is that our bold and brilliant daughter Ayesha is now trained to carry out active combat missions in her Chinese-made F7PG fighter jet, a variant of the Soviet MiG21. What does this entail? In times of need she would be supposed to demonstrate her feat and use the aircraft to perform ground attack missions and also undertake the point air defence. She and rest of her four colleagues (who are currently being trained) would be given the task of attacking like their male counterparts. This is their job and they are supposed to be trained to deliver with passion and determination. So this denotes that being trained as combat pilot is not about looking great in uniform and attracting media- it is serious work.

Do I need to remind that if these women pilots are ever required for performing their duties it would be most probably against an enemy country so by no means it would be a 'friendly match'.

Around the globe women have been used as instruments of wars. There is documented evidence that men in Uniform have raped unarmed civilian women in war and conflict situations. In many cultures and sub-cultures

women have been used as a commodity to settle dispute. In times of disasters women and girls have been traded off. The women in military face sexual assaults within their units. Researchers at Iowa University US found that 79 percent of participants reported experiences of sexual harassment during their military service; 30 percent of the women reported an attempted or completed rape. The unfair saga of disempowering and dishonouring fair sex is endless but it requires an empathetic eye to register and recognize this all.

What is the degree and duration of empowerment for women in the military and that too in combat ones? I am not aware of set of rules regarding women in frontline in the Armed Forces of Pakistan but my desk review could not find any committee on gender perspectives like the one NATO has. I could not find any data regarding national and international laws of dealing Muslim and Pakistani women combats if they become prisoners of war.

The queries about patriarchal culture, resistance by men and even women against skilled and brainy women, ego shocks, gender subordination etc. etc. are not in my radar as these are yet to be answered and in some cases raised even in civilian setups of traditional sectors.

Pakistan is an interesting country-a country riddled with contrasts and contradictions-a country that has Nuclear power but no electricity, a country that has filthy rich rulers but empty treasury, a country where a woman was elected twice as the Prime Minister but where a vast

majority of women are still illiterate, economically disadvantaged and victims of male friendly interpretations of laws, culture and religion the inclusion of women in a non-traditional sector like combat military without guarantying social security and enabling environment could be too costly in non-monetized terms.

I do not have any position on this issue as yet and that is why I began by declaring myself clearly confused.

In a futile attempt to end my confusion I tried to look for answers through examining policies and practices in US where women make up 14% of the 1.4 million active military personnel. It was only in 2013, that Pentagon revised its policy and lifted the ban on combat positions for women. When the ban was intact I found the following opinion very realistic.

“The nation's pride in our military women does not justify assignments in direct ground combat, which involves more than the experience of being in danger, or even the risk of ambush..... At times, we have no choice about sending young men to war, but we do have a choice when it comes to sending young women. Changing that would be a mistake...” this was the opinion of Ms. Elaine Donnelly, President, Centre for Military Readiness, a US based independent, nonpartisan public policy organization that specializes in military/social issues and advocates high, single standards in all forms of military training and sound priorities in the making of military/social policies in a New York Times story in 2007.

Now that the ban is over, a story carried out by the army times in US quoted an official as

saying that changing the policy will cause few problems. A few troops won't like it, but most have seen women deployed and accept it already. It's likely to have the same effect as the repeal of 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell', the policy that allowed gays and lesbians to serve but required them to hide their sexuality. "The effect of that?" the official said. "A big zero."

*The Writer is a gender expert and an activist!*

**Published in The Spokesman, Tuesday, 23 July 2013**

# **Women: Thy Name is Peace-Building. A Non- Diplomatic Outlook**

*Striving for intra-or inter-regional peace can never be successful, if it is viewed from a military lens only, and efficacy of people to people prism is not apprehended.*

The role of women in peace building, as a subject matter is quite in vogue these days, especially among the political and civil society. However, it has yet to be settled that whose cup of tea is it and whose constituency is it?

Conventionally, the focus and connected multidimensional themes of it remain confined to the certain academic institutions and, are also made visibly invisible by the iron curtains of security related military and semi civilian institutes.

What is peace? What is peace building? What are and should be the acceptable and ethical rules of engagement? Who are or should be the stakeholders? Should this be donor driven and or donor dependent or should it arise from grass roots with an innate sense of ownership while partnering with international community of experts and technical and aid organizations? Whether or not these larger than life queries are fully and satisfactorily answered; it remains a fact that a substantial number of players in political, International donors, UN and Non-profits

systems are currently functional and operational in Pakistan on the very issue of peace building.

Barring few exceptions of genuinely interested and specialist ones, a particular breed of 'connoisseur', have surfaced as self-styled custodians of the complex spectrum of peace building within the country as well as in specific connection with India and Afghanistan. Alongside it appears that a concealed clash subsists between the merely passion driven ones and perpetually power hungry groups (I have simply classified the broader categories of players).

Notwithstanding the loopholes, biases and oversights the positive aspect of this entire state of affairs is that a number of socially conscious and amply qualified women and feminist men with specialization in various branches of learning of media, research, disasters and development are taking the lead.

A very effective instrument that is being used by a credible international organization, Search for Common Ground's Pakistan office is working on the issues of peace building through youth and media. Amongst notable local organizations the Peace, Education and Development (PEAD) Foundation is employing a series of policy dialogues with different layers and levels of stakeholders. Engaging the parliamentarians has also been observed in various initiatives.

It is wished that 100 new faces in the current assembly and re- elected old ones would not focus on excursions in foreign tours but would really concentrate on their capacity building in connection with such initiatives where a considerable amount of resources is allocated to

exposure visits of parliamentarians (high profile aka well connected and agenda setting TV anchors are also included in the list).

While these and other related efforts are result oriented but just as it took women rights movement to reap some of the fruits of their struggle in the form of seven pro-women laws only in the last seven to eight years it would take at least sometime for establishing the connection of women in Pakistan with peace building.

Striving for intra-or inter-regional peace can never be successful, if it is viewed from a military lens only and efficacy of people to people prism is not apprehended. People to People contacts clasp small and medium sized traders especially women entrepreneurs (there are eight registered women's chambers in Pakistan with an approximate membership of over 2,000 women entrepreneurs and business owners). One does not need to be an expert to forecast where the future of foreign policy lies or what is the magical glue that binds people and ultimately the states? Yes it was, it is and it would remain the economic ties.

And let me further unpack 'People to People', it includes poorest of the poor, slum dwellers, women farmers and labourers, youth from rural areas and urban middle classes.

This qualification should not be equated as exclusion of the technocrats and elites of different leagues.

The inclusion of non-elites and lesser children of God would facilitate transfer of empathy and put real issues like poverty, lack of health, education, livelihood opportunities and basic minimum

needs at the centre of the stage. Hopefully, it would compel the earthly authors of our destinies to admit that peace is the only inevitable condition that needs to be fulfilled before channelling development funds and erecting development programs and projects in public, private and voluntary sectors.

It may initiate the deconstruction of victimhood and inherent folly of the patriarchal mind-sets and structures of power to deny the inclusion of women in healing war torn societies and the outcome hopefully would see women as effective negotiators and decision makers too.

*The writer is a freelancer*

**Published in The Spokesman, Wednesday, 10 July 2013**

## **Women's Beat!**

*In 2010, while conducting damages need assessment on behalf of the World Bank and Asian Development Bank, I found one time very famous and beautiful Pashto singer Zar Sanga originally a gypsy among flood victims; in rags- it was too shocking.*

What were and are issues of women and girls in music and their reception, expression and social politics in pre-Zia and post-Zia Pakistani society, cultures and subcultures? I talked to some authorities in the areas of gender. Not many were at ease with the idea of accepting that music is their or could be their pursuit. However, more mature gender experts were honest in sharing that they do not know of any credible research at any level on this and some advised me to consult the library data base of our very elite institute like National College of Arts or an institute like Lok Virsa more known for its multitalented Executive Directors like Dr. Adam Nayyar and Dr. Uxi Mufti rather than its academic work and researches. I did neither because to me what was shocking that Google search on Pakistan with key words violence nor gender issues yield millions of suggested sites. Thus, I can sadly and safely assume now that any standard experimental, action or innovative research studies on the music with gender and sexuality and Pakistan virtually do not exist, at least on the cyberspace.

Obviously, a number of resources are available on the subject in other countries

particularly Germany and USA. "Work It: Gender, Race, and Sexuality in Pop Music Professions", the theme brought together a group of prominent music journalists, scholars, musicians and music industry professionals in an annual conference of UCLA who discussed the changing roles in the contemporary' pop music.

Interestingly, sexuality, its exploration and its exhibition has always been a part of the music and an exercise for self-expression and hard core moralists and feminists has never been able to affect it. However, the gender and sexuality seemed to play a pivotal role in the daily life work of women as can be interpreted from Hanna Pantile, Assistant Vice President of corporate and media relations at BMI. "You walk in a woman, you walk out a woman. You walk in a man, you walk out a man. It's very hard to feel that you're not a woman. Everyone comes in with their own impression of what you're going to be. There is no avoiding it."

Is gender in a particular social and cultural milieu affects the production and consumption of music in all of its forms? Does religion or its popular or imposed interpretation illuminate or bemuse the pathways of musicians and singers especially women?

Maggie Nicols, a 65 years old Scottish free-jazz and improvising vocalist, dancer, and performer hoped in an excellent piece entitled "Gender and Music: 'In Our Different Rhythms Together' that maybe one day, there will no longer be the need for special features on gender; a post Patriarchal Capitalist society will experience genuine diversity and humankind's

multidimensional differences will be what unifies us. Until then, I'm happy to grapple with the contradictions of gender and music in our time." She further contemplated that is there such a thing, outside cultural conditioning, as feminine or masculine music? "I can only write from the limited perspective of history, personal political experience & the times we live in now."

Irrespective of the virtual and literal drones and dissonance in the music world, somehow women surfaced and survived in music in different capacities around the world. Luckily, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan is no exception that bears the honour; some geniuses in music also among women despite unique disabling environs and disputed verdicts on religious legitimacy of different genres of music. In the entire history of Pakistan, other than Irene Perveen from 1950's and Benjamin sisters from 1980's, I cannot trace any big name in music among women from Pakistani Christians.

Exceptional women singers had to bear exceptional circumstances and yet they keep their art and craft alive. For instance in 1999, late Iqbal Bano, a par excellence Ghazal singer who also had a major contribution in popularizing a resistance poem (Ham Daikhain Geiy/we shall see by Faiz Ahmed Faiz) while responding to my queries on issues of women in difficult professions (I interviewed her for my pioneering and award winning TV series Gender Watch for PTV) revealed some painful aspects of the personal life of Maleka-e-Mosequee, Roshan Ara Begum, who after partition lived mostly in Lala Musa. "*Voh Matkay Mein Moun Dall Kar Riaaz*

*Kiya Kartee Theen Takay Aaspaas Logon Ko Pata Na Chalay K Yahan Gaana Hota Hay”.*

Our first officially recognized pop icon late Nazia Hasan who is yet to be replaced by anyone in terms of her physical beauty, academic qualification and light in her persona used to be shown on TV screen mostly through mid-shots (thanks to the creativity of our genius Shoaib Mansoor) when Zia was physically alive. It was only in Music 89, the then youth was entitled to see a fully swinging Nazia. In spite of all this still the brother sis duo faced much less hindrance from dictator’s said and unsaid censor code due to their affluent background, elite class and connections as may be verified by the fact that the State TV and print media used to offer as much coverage and with as much less restrictions as were permissible.

Many women folk singers from Balochistan, NWFP /KP, Sindh and Punjab rose to fame but most of them ended in destitution with no support from the state and society. As a part of prevalent wisdom Pashtuns are perceived as most conservative and anti-music, though I personally believe that it is a myth because revered Ghani Khan has written that a Pashtun’s violent nature, strong body and tender heart make a very unstable combination for living, but an ideal one for poetry, love and colour.

Class structures and ethnicity are supposed to be seen differently because they have different consequences in Pakistan. Naseem Niazi of Faisalabad, popularly known as Mala used to be an exceedingly popular play back singer, suffered career decline with the arrival of a Bengali Runa

Laila, died quietly in loneliness and poverty in Lahore in 1990.

Mashooq Sultan a valued Pashto singer is living in desolation while one time world famous and rich Reshma, the folk singer from the desert is certainly not very comfortable as a deteriorating cancer patient. In 2010, while conducting damages need assessment on behalf of the World Bank and Asian development Bank, I found one time very famous and beautiful Pashto singer Zar Sanga, originally a gypsy among flood victims; in rags- it was too shocking.

Zeb and Hanya, a household name since 2008, two young modern Pashtun women, belong to a different class and have comfortable living conditions; therefore, in these turbulent times they are seen as ambassadors of Pakistan in the west and fortunately they do not face any obvious threat. But not every young Pashtun woman in music or entertainment industry is lucky or safe. A 24 year old highly popular and particularly good looking woman singer of Pashto music from Swat valley, Ghazala Javed was killed last year along with her father.

The life and style of Madam Nur Jahan is almost an open book. But what most fail to decipher are the strengths of that legend in her capacity as a wife, beloved, film producer and mother. Our hypocrite society stigmatized her and condemned her with harsh words but her voice lives on. "I always found it difficult to imagine a world where there would be no Madam Nur Jehan, but the unthinkable came to pass as the year 2000 was drawing to a close. Nur Jehan is gone and never shall we see her like again, nor

hear that voice, though it will live in the music she left us” wrote my one of the most favourite English journalists and I found it most apt posthumous tribute as I found his essay on her in his book score card as the most befitting tribute to a living woman and singer.

One can go on and on with the narratives on decline, dejection and depression in the lives of woman singers here.

I end here without ending my search on credible academic and action research of women in music in Pakistan in the specific context of gender and expecting that at some point our society and state would pay an overdue tribute to the women in music and performing arts without commenting on their physical charms and judging their morality.

**Published in The Spokesman, Thursday, 21 November, 2013**

**OP-ED**

## **A Peek into the Patriarchal Media**

*Data on the state of gender in Pakistani media is needed straight away in order to devise policies that can address the problems of patriarchy within the media in a country that has low literacy*

**Disclosures** that made high profile dignitaries in politics and media uncomfortable, occupied a tangible space in the news in 2017. The media (that is seen by the sufferers as their voice against sexual harassment of women is largely, with exceptions aside) itself is a captive to hegemonic masculinity. This is evident by the under-representation of women in senior cadres, noticeable gender stereotyping, binary discussion of gender, leaning towards noxious reporting of sexual violence, allegiance to patriarchal narratives, homophobia, sexism, racism and ageism.

Celebrating diversity, encouraging flexible hours for women journalists, gender balance in the newsrooms and editorial coverage, though articulated through icons in well-framed projects is yet to become an official reality for a vast majority of media women.

The role of media in plummeting gender discrimination was recognised by the UN's Fourth Women World Conference, in Beijing in 1995. Then 189 states adopted women and media as one of the 12 critical areas for women empower-

ment so that the number and clout of women in media could be enhanced.

The push of technology and pull of UN-induced respect for human rights, urge media to detach itself from patriarchal consensus for a while. For instance, the idiot-box, since its inception in the early 1930s and industrial accessibility in the late 1930s, has reasonably matured. Betty Friedan credited for starting the contemporary feminist movement and writing *The Feminine Mystique* the book that is one of the cornerstones of American feminism asserted in 1964 that “television has represented the American Woman as a “stupid, unattractive, insecure little household drudge who spends her martyred mindless, boring days dreaming of love — and plotting nasty revenge against her husband.”

Regrettably, it does the same through various insensitive morning shows and soaps on private channels in Pakistan, even today. Media industry makes money by marketing women on TV and film mostly as visually appealing items and occasionally as brainy protagonists (though the two are not necessarily mutually exclusive). Women too, in the ruthless race of corporate climbing, seldom, rebuff their manipulation. The 21st century is aimed to revolutionise women but the mass media today, at large, is male and elite.

Research divulges stirring and ironical particulars about women in media. Harriet Harman from the labour party in 2013, stated that a Brit woman’s days are ‘numbered’ on TV once she reached the age of 50. The Celluloid Ceiling report 2016 by the Centre for the Study of

Women in Television and Film revealed that women only accounted for roughly 17 per cent of the industry in the US for behind the scene roles. The International Women's Media Foundation DC conducted a 59-nation study in 2010, to determine the women's status in news media through the indicators of ownership, publishing, governance, reporting, editing, photojournalism, broadcast production and other media. It determined representation of women in the workforce of full-time journalism, is only a third (33.3 per cent) of the 522 companies surveyed and women have increased their ranks in the top management jobs, compared to a Margaret Gallagher's study in 1995 that showed women occupying on average of only 12 per cent of the top management positions in 239 nations.

The glass ceilings barriers were found mostly in middle and senior management levels. Only a little more than half of the companies, evaluated, had a clearly-placed policy on gender equity. The sample from Pakistan, in the said study, incorporated five TV stations, four newspapers and one radio station. Approximately a fifth i.e. 22 percent has a specific policy on gender equity, only 44 percent have a policy on maternity leave and some 22 percent provide some form of child-care assistance.

***Research divulges stirring and ironical particulars about women in media. In 2013, Harriet Harman from the Labour party stated that a British woman's days are 'numbered' on TV once she reaches the age of 50***

None has a policy on paternity leave, sexual harassment and to return women to their same

jobs after maternity leave. The good news is that most of the women are able to secure full-time jobs with benefits and salaries that are fairly comparable in the average low ranges (though less so in the average high range where men's salaries are higher). Women who are in governing boards are usually related to the owners; a trend found in both Pakistani and Indian media companies.

The Global Media Monitoring Project, in its cohort study, on changing the portrayal of women in the media, noticed in 2015, that in Pakistan, the number of women reporters and presenters may have improved but substantial stories of the 'real Pakistani women remain invisible' and the tradition of news stories with women being 'sensationalised, trivialised and sexual objectification' lasts.

Data on the state of gender in Pakistani media is straight away needed in order to devise policies that can address the problems of patriarchy within the media in Pakistan that has low literacy and high digital literacy. Underprivileged population especially youth is hugely influenced by media. Gender disparities cannot be bridged only by social media warriors. Thus, sensible and sensitised professionals are critically needed in media to understand this responsibility.

Eroticisation of women and glorification of affluence are impairing the emotional health and ethical values of its consumers. The institutionalisation of patriarchy and its myriad expressions must be adequately challenged. The paucity of authentic portrayal of women needs to be compensated with genuine women heroes.

Women issues must be led by evolved women who can thrive without godfathers. The achievement of gender parity does need male champions and this must happen without the suppression of independent voices.

*The writer is a gender expert, author and activist. She tweets @survivorwins*

**Published in The Daily Times, December 18, 2017**

**OP-ED**

## **Acknowledging Inconvenient Inequalities**

*The mathematical materialisation of gender equality and human equality is the act of the calm economists and not of the emotional rights activists. One out of every 5 people in the world lives in South Asia and 6 South Asian countries rank in the bottom 20 in terms of addressing inequalities on recently devised CRI (Commitment to Reducing Equality Index), that measures the commitment of 152 governments to reducing the gap between the rich and the poor by measuring the government action on social spending, tax and labour rights.*

**Though ‘Might is Right’ is still the standard global order but officially ‘Right is Might’ is professed. Therefore, the progress of countries is measured by the United Nations, since 1990, not by their GNP only but also in terms of equalities in Human Development. It is focused on people, their opportunities and entails the ability to sustain, to maintain self-esteem and the freedom to choose as its core values.**

**Though the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are hailed as the most successful anti-poverty movement in history, the world remains unequal. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), a transforming agenda with a set of 17 goals and 244 indicators and deadline of year 2030 is the new commitment. It is widely agreed**

that the SDG 10 (reduced inequalities) and SDG 5 (gender equality) are necessary building blocks for all the development goals to be realised.

***Our society is judging rather than understanding people and becoming spitefully status sentient. Meanwhile, the political, military and civil elites are swiftly ensuring alternate stable lives in foreign countries***

Even in 2017, the women suffer most from either the poverty of income or opportunities or both, and are the first to be harmed and last to be heard. Where do Pakistani women stand in the world that has no morality in politics and diplomacy, where high military expenditures and anti-poor and male power structures still continue to shape the countries? The development of our people including women and that of Pakistan is not mutually exclusive provided one adheres to the standard definition of development i.e. better lives for all people. ‘All’ is the secret in the recipe of development. Let’s try looking inwards — a difficult exercise. However, the intellectual courage, to look at some random examples and validated data may aid many of us in sensing two Pakistans; a Pakistan of masses and a Pakistan of classes with little if any space for the influence of self-made and hardworking men in general and women in particular.

Professor Emeritus Richard Wilkinson in his book with Professor Kate Pickett **The Spirit Level** argued that more unequal countries have much more violence, worse life expectancy, more mental illness, more obesity, more people in prison, and more teenage births. All these problems get worse

with greater inequality, because it damages the social fabric of a society.

What are the expressions of such damages in our country? The society is judging rather than understanding people and becoming spitefully status sentient. Our political, military and civil elites are swiftly ensuring alternate stable lives in foreign countries. Take a random sample and find out where their children are studying and or settled abroad, where their monetary investments are; how many of them have dual nationalities?

The normative status assigned to the vulgar display of wealth in our architecture, weddings, TV morning shows and mistreatment of socially weak has become a trademark of our society. The abuses against children, women and girls, unreported cases of pestering of women, and prostitution among the college going young women are escalating. The commoditisation of health and education, absence of merit and selective activism by the civil society are distressing. The social comparisons and anxieties are increasing. The roles of gender-filtered donor funded activities that are often are nurturing nepotism, adhocism, prescriptive and unviable solutions merit a separate discussion.

Pakistan sees very high maternal (260/100000 live births) and infant (66.57/1000 live births) mortality rates and an incredibly high gender gap. Only 19.3 per cent of women in Pakistan reach secondary education compared to 46.1 per cent of men, while female participation in the labour market is 24.6 per cent compared to 82.9 per cent for men. Pakistan is ranked 148th best country in the world out of 172 for

children to grow up in, reveals a report 'Stolen Childhood 2017'. Pakistan stands on 139, on CRI, as the disadvantaged communities specially women face massive inequities. As a country with the medium human development, Pakistan is ranking 147 out of 188 countries and territories and 121st out of 155 countries on Gender Inequality Index.

The difference between patience and criminal silence must be acknowledged. The people have an indubitably notable nerve here and there is an A list of few achievers in Pakistan, to make us proud. However, the projection of this pride and positivity must not take away the attention from the social and legal endorsement of many forms of visible and invisible misogyny, elitist consensus and exclusionary practices.

Such discriminations are marching into the mind-sets of the media, manifestos of the political parties and management of public sector, voluntary and private sector organisations. This rather faceless and shadowy leaning must be discerned and diagnosed. The game changers, disrupters and charismatic leaders must take immediate Pakistan and people-centric actions to ensure human security, transformational leadership, gender mainstreaming and accessible social justice as human development and women empowerment and inequalities cannot coexist.

*The writer is a gender expert, researcher, activist and a free thinker. She can be reached at dr.r.perveen@gmail.com*

**Published In The Daily Times, September 27, 2017**

## OP-ED

# Ageism and Competent Women

*Ageism is the latest innovation in patriarchy that is bound to be the ultimate battlefield of all women who are fighting their equality and empowerment cases in hostile board rooms; trying to break the brass and glass ceilings; opposing the language of discrimination; rejecting benevolence, sexism and paradigms of limitations*

Despite experiencing a cycle of discrimination that starts at the prenatal stage, girls have greater survival rate and longevity. According to the medical journal *The Lancet* (2009), more than half of all babies born in industrialized nations since the year 2000 can expect to live into the triple digits. Thus, a little girl born after 2007 will have an average life expectancy, of 100 in many western countries and 104 in the US. Would there be a global gender harmony then or is she most likely to face a wounding nexus of abuse and ageism and her career stalled by a reduced tolerance for aging women at work?

According to the global age watch index (2015) Afghanistan graded lowest in the list of 96 countries and Pakistan bagged 92<sup>nd</sup> position. Pakistan's life expectancy will increase to 72 years by 2023 and yet geriatric medicine is neither customary nor routinely exercise in Pakistan. The influence of ageism in countries like ours that are characterised by the patriarchal

consensus in socio-development sectors, low scores on human development indicators and marked gender disparities remain an untapped area of research and policy advocacy.

Ageism is one of the many expressions of chauvinism and is a relatively less recognized reality. In the 1960's along with the feminism and racism, the term ageism was constructed. The creator was the Pulitzer Prize-winning geriatrician Robert Butler who defined it as a process of systematic stereotyping of and discrimination against people because they are old, just as racism and sexism accomplish this with skin colour and gender. Old people are categorised as senile, rigid in thought and manner, old-fashioned in morality and skills. Ageism allows the younger generations to see older people as different from themselves; thus they subtly cease to identify with their elders as human beings."

***According to the Global Age Watch Index 2015, Afghanistan graded lowest in the list of 96 countries and Pakistan bagged 92<sup>nd</sup> position***

Canada, (currently governed by a feminist premier) used to hold the top spot on gender equality in 1995, but plummeted to 25th over the last 20 years. It has the poorest of the poor women within its vulnerable populations. The comparative rate of poverty among the Canadian single senior women (18 percent) is double the poverty rate among single senior men.

The US, (number 28 on gender inequality in the year 2016) has the robust evidence of age discrimination, in hiring against older women

despite having an ADEA (Age Discrimination in Employment Act) that protects individuals who are 40 years of age or older from employment discrimination based on age.

Age discrimination is the number one cause of poverty in Japan, standing 111 on gender inequality. Women in China (63rd in gender inequality), where girls are banned from studying a variety of subjects — apparently out of respect for women’s safety, face the great wall of inequity in employment.

Ageism-discrimination is experienced by women in nearly all countries including brazenly dependent countries like ours where human/gender equality is seldom an actual practice but merely a widely consumed jargon in the technical proposals of aid agencies and official stances.

In the prime of my youth, I re-read Simon de Beauvoir’s, “the coming of old age” and was struck by this insight. While wondering that are old people really human beings, I framed a portrait of “Pakistani Society’s secret shame” in *Sinf aur Burhapa* (gender and old age), one of the 19-episodes in my award-winning series “Gender Watch” in 1999-2000 on the state owned PTV, as a private producer.

For the past twenty-five years or so, I have been living as a self-made professional (a *sans* botox ageing woman) and been travelling across the globe including Pakistan, doing rights based advocacy, vocalising and conducting research on women’s issues like gender based violence, social entrepreneurship, leadership, career growth, reproductive health, representation of women in

politics, media and security sectors. One of my key discoveries is to “value youth over experience” which is an almost implicit policy and an explicit practice for the last 8-10 years in the case of women.

Single parents and divorced women bear the greater burden of ageism. Globally, 70 percent of the world’s poor are women, and old women are the poorest of the poor. While it may take an estimated 170 years to achieve global economic equality, women, it seems, are eternally destined to cope with the scrutiny on their physical appearance — a sexist trial that does not seem to similarly impact men. The sanguinity that the world is finally entering the age of women may need a review.

Mere avoidance of ageist adjectives and usage of badass in feminist forums may have soothing effects acoustically, visually and emotionally but it would neither increase the call back rate of competent ageing women job applicants nor create roles and relevance of seasoned women performers in film, theatre and TV.

Ageism is the latest innovation in patriarchy that is bound to be the ultimate battle field of all women who are fighting their equality and empowerment cases in hostile board rooms; trying to break the brass and glass ceilings; opposing the language of discrimination; rejecting benevolence, sexism and limiting paradigms. Ageism is the reflection of an intellectual crisis, and must be attended as a disaster by policy makers in all sectors, social gatekeepers and the media.

*The writer is a Gender Expert, researcher, activist and  
a free thinker. She can be reached at  
dr.r.perveen@gmail.com*

**Published In The Daily Times, September 19, 2017**

**OP-ED**

## **Beware Of ‘Benevolent’ Sexism**

*More than a few women, irrespective of their qualifications and socio-economic strata, craftily and cannily accept the ‘benefits’ of benevolent sexism, eventually lose their dignity and are ridiculed by men in their tête-à-tête time*

**E**ven today, as per the researches, women are paid 80 cents for every dollar earned by a man, are less likely to get promoted blamelessly in the workplace and are pushed to achieve perfect prettiness to fit in a saleable setting.

A singular factor cannot be responsible for this unfairness but sexism is undoubtedly, one of the biggest blocks against gender equality and empowerment. Overlooking, how Ms Hillary Clinton was dissected vividly for her makeup-free face and her husband’s imprudence, may not be possible for many of us in media and other industries. The control and capacity of sexism and realisation of its damages is lamentably limited, even amongst a good number of the established urbanised, modernised and liberal folks; who are consumers and practitioners of a socially appealing and culturally endorsed form of sexism – the benevolent sexism.

Chivalry too is used interchangeably with benevolent sexism. “Chivalry is sexist and it is dead, at least as far as equal rights are concerned”, are one of the many widely circulated

views if not conclusions among feminist circles. Is it justifiable to equate a helping hand offered to a woman who is frail, disabled and or pregnant as benevolent sexism? Should women be treated as priority in rescue services or in humanitarian settings? Why should women be allocated special quotas in parliaments when they have to act as male proxies and extensions of male power? These are simultaneously brutal, interesting and relevant questions of our deceitful times. A gender-less courtesy and helping people equitably may be a fair way to deal with this complex scenario.

Various TV screens across the globe, UN, Development and related forums as well as public policies in most of the countries are managing the notion of equality between gender/s', women's' rights and empowerment through different mechanisms and means. The self-styled custodians of morality and social gatekeepers in many cultures/sub cultures and societies look at these right-based issues and uphill struggle to address them with skepticism, sarcasm and stigma. The overall resistance against these concepts and conviction is conventional and complicated.

Many psychologists have effectively maintained that women may abide by benevolent sexism as a gentle practice. Social psychologists, Peter Glick and Susan Fiske, who largely developed the framework of Ambivalent Sexism, which theorised that sexism has two sub-components: "hostile sexism" and "benevolent sexism", established through their research that Hostile Sexism reflects overtly negative

evaluations and stereotypes about a gender (e.g. the ideas that women are incompetent and inferior to men); Benevolent Sexism represents evaluations of gender that may appear subjectively positive (subjective to the person who is evaluating), but are actually damaging to people and gender equality more broadly (e.g., the ideas that women need to be protected by men). Glick and Fiske also asserted that power relationships between men and women foster an ambivalent form of bias towards women.

***Addressing professional women with inappropriate salutations like ‘darling’ by a male in authority and acceptance, appreciation and endorsement of this salutation by women is sycophantic.***

The convenience concealed in the benevolent sexism, that by no means is an oxymoron, has a price tag for women. The menacing manifestations of benevolent sexism, explored through scientific research embraces loss of women’s own belief in their cognitive capacity, increasingly less ambitious educational and career goals, augmented adherence to the stereotypes, defective and damaged arguments and actions to challenge existing gender inequalities and unsullied enslavement for financial support to a male relation.

Social media is formulating new rules in conversation. What is sexism and what is a snap in a chat may become questionable. However, addressing professional women with inappropriate salutations like ‘darling’ by a male in authority and acceptance, appreciation and

endorsement of this salutation by women is sycophantic.

There is neither naivety nor positive reception in it. This is sexism that is always malignant and like all malignancies remains subtle and pain free at the onset. Since benevolent sexism is mistakenly interpreted as benign, people in societies and bureaucracies readily accept these ideas and thus show the way, knowingly or unknowingly of creating and constructing gender gaps in nearly all spheres of human life.

If one looks even casually at the cultural, social and political landscapes of our country one cannot escape to sense overt hostile and covert benevolent sexism resulting in lesser competent women in business and government leadership roles. Additionally, women, who identify, practical and strategic gender needs, gender biases and discrimination and speak up for gender equity, equality and lawful entitlements receive hostility not only from a majority of men but many women as well.

All shapes and forms of sexism are extremely detrimental to personal growth and character of professionals in a society at large. More than a few women, at different geological locations irrespective of their qualifications and socio-economic strata, craftily and cannily accept the 'benefits' of benevolent sexism, eventually lose their dignity and are ridiculed by men in their *tête-à-tête* time.

What I have learnt so far in my capacity as a woman in leadership positions, that while organisations must demonstrate zero tolerance to violence including sexism (blatant and benevolent

both), women too, must not be allowed, pressed and encouraged, inwardly and outwardly to seek the concessions of their femaleness, that very often appear desirable to men who mostly occupy all power positions and resources. Remember, there is no such thing as suddenly equal and instantly empowered.

*The writer is a gender expert, researcher, activist and a free thinker. She can be reached at  
dr.r.perveen@gmail.com*

**Published In The Daily Times, October 26, 2017**

## Blog

# Bullied Not Broken!

I recently was part of a project that aims at equipping women with power in police organisations, with the backing of male champions. This project gave me another opportunity to “work” and “breathe” in a government outfit, visit police stations and directly interact with the police personnel from different cadre and regions and activate everyday feminism. Some observations are as follows:

1. Open expressions of abhorrence and repugnance towards the very words ‘Feminist’ and ‘Gender’.

The common interpretations thereof these concepts/terms are anti-Pakistani, anti-Islam and most probably a lesbian. Hence, I reframed my introduction as follows; I am a straight Muslim feminist who does not get the jobs I deserve because I co-founded a non-profit with a renowned scientist in Pakistan.

2. Obscure and overt stigmatisation of many single women and mothers (especially if they are divorced) and do not hide their marital status. I was operating with a duo of *Bhabhi Begum* and a socialite (who are suddenly transformed into gender experts to launch their careers in development sector as they wanted to create an additional identity besides being the spirit of the kitty parties). I personally believe that this was very positive development in their lives provided they are not usurping the rights and dignity of competent professionals. In a lunch meeting,

the *Bhabhi Begum* underscored her sacrifices for keeping her “love marriage” intact and eulogised the role of her mother who told her clearly that she had to bear with her in-laws/*Susralis* till her last breath. This was completely understandable provided she would not have looked at me with taunting eyes and joined by all mighty men in the reaction. In a second, my mother and I became worthless and indecent women. Though staggered by this newly gained status, somehow I maintained my composure as that appeared the only option in my capacity as a skilled expert but a needy divorced mother.

3. The disliking for women who refuse to seek the concessions of being women, act strong and dress up simply and professionally was palpable. A senior official said in the presence of other team members: “Smile, become the most favourite baby”. Obviously, my instant reaction was not taken in positive stride. (The duo kept on giggling and smiling in different sequences). On another occasion, the head of the organisation said (in the presence of a woman and a male police director) that why do you look so plain-what happened to your face? The duo used to give me makeup tips, insisted on using their supplies on my face. They ‘politely’ demonstrated their work priorities by applying makeup and nail colours while I was at their desks for some urgent work.

4. Contrary to conventional wisdom, the targets of office bullies are not the new, inexperienced and less confident employees. The targets of bullying are the highly competent, accomplished and experienced employees. And independent, experienced workers like myself, pose the greatest

threat to the bullies. And when bullies find targets that refuse to be controlled and intimidated, they escalate their behaviour. This was in full action there too.

5. There is neither respect nor acknowledgment of any competent and honest woman, who wants to survive in the system without making compromises of different and difficult sorts. The serious issue of harassment of police and non-police women is a too frequent and too side-lined a concern. Not all women show solidarity for women who are suffering and are vulnerable. The officials at the helm of affairs have total disregard for women rights and respect. They frequently and habitually hound by displaying selective abusive powers, freely use verbal abuse and have no interest in gender mainstreaming or implementing the principles and practices of gender equality. They are class-conscious and treat women according to their social power and to their personal likes and dislikes.

I ignored many offences at a personal level and finally ended up in psychiatry OPD. Being someone who has been struggling against gender discrimination and exploitation for the last 25 years or so and working in harsh environs, I can safely and surely state that nepotism, lack of transparency, overnight manufacturing of experts in different disciplines to oblige *Bhabhis*, *Begums*, butterflies and build networks of benefits within the civil bureaucracy create enabling environment for gender discrimination and make it thrive even in the programs and projects that are mandated to combat it.

P.S. I sincerely pray that those two women and likes of them develop some humility and never traumatise women in my situation. I also pray that those men never use naked power and exploit job seekers like myself.

P.S 2. I have written this blog to protect other women and as a self-reminder that I should not focus on hurt but the lessons as I will keep on growing!

*The writer is a gender expert and activist. She is also a divorced single mother. She emailed this piece to two reputed English dailies but it was published by none.*

**Published in The Daily Times, November 27, 2017**

## OP-ED

# Contraception!

*A woman's ill health, maternal morbidity and mortality are not seen as 'abnormal' and 'preventable' situations but have attained a normative position, both in the mind-sets of the State and the society*

**T**he World Health Organisation affirms that promotion of Family Planning (FP) is indispensable, for the well-being and autonomy of women, while supporting the health and development of communities. Currently, 214 million women of reproductive age in developing countries who want to avoid pregnancy are not using a modern contraceptive method.

Patriarchal arrangement, (vain) bargain and discrimination, function as strategic stumbling blocks in shaping genderised union between population and development, in Pakistan, as well. A fitting example is women's access to their health. Demographic and Health Survey 2012-13, of Pakistan, reported that almost two-thirds of women face at least one problem in accessing health care. More than half of women were concerned about going alone. Four in ten women were concerned about management of transportation. More than one-third of women were concerned about distance to the health facility. About 30% of women in Balochistan receive, antenatal care, from a skilled provider compared to 94 percent in Islamabad.

It is pertinent to recall that Pakistan's population grew by 3.3 times between 1970 and 2015, a considerably greater increase than India (2.4 times), Bangladesh (2.5 times) or Indonesia (2.2 times), during the same period. The number of children aged 0-15 in Pakistan increased by 43 percent, compared with 14 percent in India, six percent in Bangladesh and eight percent in Indonesia.

The first setback to Pakistani FP program, that started in 1950s, became conspicuous when in 1977, General Zia ul Haq, after toppling the elected government of Bhutto, arrested the existing program and barred the publicity of any FP-related activity. The hurried devolution by Zardari Government, in 2010, too jolted the program. The value of human capital, volume of monetary resource allocation, scale of community connection, quality of contraceptive products and candour of policies, too, manipulate and manage the efficiency and influence of population related interventions. The nexus of National Finance Commission Award and FP programme in Pakistan is not highlighted unambiguously in official statements. The media, *mullah* and men in family and in policy-making with the shared sum of economic benefits; dictate the knotty and thorny choices in reproductive health including FP.

***There is no magical wand to implement healthy spacing and timing on pregnancy. Respect for human dignity including women, empathy at the level of decision making and setting right priorities must be the measurable indicators.***

The landmark International Conference on Population and Development of Cairo in 1994 established FP as a fundamental human right but took the lime light to the umbrella term reproductive health. One of the primary goals of its Programme of Action (PoA) was to make FP universally available by 2015 as part of a broadened approach to reproductive health and rights. It was later extended indefinitely. Pakistan is a signatory to the PoA adopted by the conference, that to date remains largely unfinished. The London Summit 2012 that renewed the international interest in FP is mainly owed to the foresightedness of Melinda Gates. The Gates Foundation funds a number of pro-abortion groups, like Planned Parenthood affiliates globally and Marie Stopes International. According to our government's updated pledge 2020, in July 2017, at the FP Summit, London, Pakistan will contribute 6.7 million additional users, (3.4 million already reported and an additional 3.3 million to be added), in attaining a contraceptive prevalence rate of 50%. This will be achieved through additional resources, raising the per capita expenditure on FP to \$2.50.

This land of pure is characterised by not only by dismal statistics on socio-economic and gender indices but is also an outlier in the Asian region regarding demographic transition. Pakistan has to honour its own pledge through sincere actions and not merely interventions that can be politely referred to conference-tourism. There is no magical wand to implement healthy spacing and timing on pregnancy. Respect for human dignity including women, empathy at the

level of decision making and setting right priorities must be the measurable indicators. If hormonal contraceptives are risky the information should be made public. Ensuring informed reproductive choices are required in the bureaucratic visions.

Men are not only the usual head of the family in Pakistan but also occupy most of the powerful positions in formal economy. Thus engaging men realistically, in FP so as to see a discernible impact in the terrain of population and development is relatable. This however, by no means, is meant to create a new dependency for women in Pakistan who are experiencing unmet needs in FP besides enduring the physical and psychological costs of the 'responsibility' of giving birth to sons, 'accessing' contraceptives and coping with failures and or unsafe abortion to name a few.

Sagacious economic policies and structural transformation are supposed to support the process of demographic transition. This sweeping schema is not only strenuous but sore too, for the critical mass of our free-riding and inattentive political elites.

A woman's ill health, maternal morbidity and mortality are not seen as 'abnormal' and 'preventable' situations but have attained a normative position, both in the mind-sets of the State and the society. The desired power of political will for a successful FP program is absent in Pakistan. Therefore, a self-evident, improved access to contraception and freedom to delay child birth through civic will has to be demonstrated in Pakistani society. Our Women

and girls have to speak up for their individualism, control on their own bodies and should empower themselves with information that could save them in the journey of their lives from preventable disasters and death. They themselves and no one else should control their choices in contraception.

*The writer is a gender expert, Public Health Specialist, researcher, author, activist and a free thinker. Twitter handle@survivorwins*

**Published In The Daily Times. November 22, 2017**

## **OP-ED**

# **Disdain for Disability**

*Dedicated to the struggles of late Dr. Fatima Shah, who was a leading Pakistani Gynaecologist, till the onset of retinitis pigmentosa in 1954 (which resulted in becoming fully blind by 1957) and transformed her into the vision of the blind at international and national levels.*

It is a terrifying fact that the most economically vulnerable are much more likely to suffer from various sorts of disabilities. Neither being poor nor being disabled is a crime, but the modern economic system treats these conditions as such – even in developed countries. In spite of the spirit and abilities that disabled people may possess, they are rarely given the opportunity to put them on display or derive benefit from them. Opportunities for rehabilitation are also hard to come by in a country like Pakistan.

Ironically, it is two Pakistani dictators who have probably done most for the disabled in this country. One was General Zia-ul-Haq, who endorsed inclusiveness by keeping his special needs daughter by his side at many public appearances. He also oversaw the passing of “The Disabled Persons (Employment and Rehabilitation) Ordinance”, which was passed into law on December 29, 1981. The other was General Musharraf, who permitted blind persons to take the civil service exams. Saima Niaz, who herself was barred from the same exams because of her blindness (and also one of Musharraf’s

friends' daughters) must be commended for her victorious advocacy. However, millions of capable disabled Pakistanis are still deprived of their constitutional rights.

The disabled are barely seen in public spaces in Pakistan. This space shrinks further for women and girls with disabilities. A disturbing video that recently emerged on social media showed that disabled children are often victimized by those charged with their care. Many challenged children and young adults are chained by their parents or guardians and this cruelty is sanctioned culturally.

The reserved quota of two percent in government jobs is not implemented with transparency by the regional and federal governments. The blind and peaceful disabled protestors who want to raise this issue have been violently silenced by the police.

A disturbing video that recently emerged on social media showed that disabled children are often victimized by those charged with their care. Many challenged children and young adults are chained by their parents or guardians and this cruelty is sanctioned culturally

Although there is no visible official notice that denies entrance to the disabled, in actuality the architecture of nearly every building, any educational institution, hospital, parks, cinemas, road, market place, offices, conveys this memorandum, loud and clear. There is no concept of giving access to the disabled in day to day life. Ramps and vestibules are the rarest sights. If there are lifts they are seldom fitting the needs of a wheel bound user. Signs bearing a

white cane are seen occasionally but there is no separate lane for the disabled anywhere. Not a single traffic signal, even in the capital city has voice signals. Not a single five-star hotel has rest rooms that could be deemed fit for the disabled.

Health is not recognized as a fundamental right in the Pakistani constitution. The public policy planning and legislation on health are mute on Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights of the disabled. No authentic statistical records are available regarding a wide spectrum of violence including sexual violence against disabled people. Sexual violence against disabled women and girls is yet to be studied scientifically.

An unsafe back street abortion, suicide, getting killed or living a life with the baggage of community condemnation are some of predictable options for the unfortunate disabled victims who become pregnant. The suffering becomes unexplainable when women with cognitive disabilities are raped and they conceive as well. There is no health care facility that could exclusively address the needs of the disabled. Trained medical doctors (even those from elite medical schools) are not skilled in treating persons with disabilities. In my entire life so far I have come across not more than twenty practicing physicians (of which fifteen were men) with disabilities, most of them had polio and two (one woman and one man) were wheelchair bound.

Any model of inclusive education for children with disabilities is yet to be mainstreamed. There are hardly any web sites that can be used by persons with a different set of physical impairments. In many instances persons with

congenital physical limitations are automatically considered “fit only for certain vocations”.

In this bleak scenario the academic fellowships offered to Pakistani citizens with disabilities especially women by the governments of the US and Australia are laudable. Some inspiring individuals too are offering exemplary services. Still, the colossal challenges of disability cannot be addressed effectively without the involvement of the state and its pillars. The media and academia should regularly organize multi-level stakeholders’ dialogues for comprehending the dynamics of disabilities. Disabled-responsive legislative actions must be instituted through the legislators and, if needed, the concerned courts may intervene.

The disability specific disdain entrenched in the official systems reverberate in the societal stance and *vice versa*. Pakistan decided to count the disabled quite late and found only 0.48 percent of them in the 2017 census. Thus, it counted out, callously the disabilities and abilities of more than 15 percent of the population. The scantiness of disabled-related public records not only thwarts services delivery but worsens their marginalization especially in humanitarian settings. Disability survives in the surroundings, not in the humans. A state not empathizing with its people who need substantial support not empty sympathy eventually becomes the symbol of its own moral and management disabilities!

*The writer is a campaigner “Ramp is Right”. She tweets @survivorwins*

**Published In The Daily Times. December 31, 2017**

**OP-ED**

## **Engendering Policing in Pakistan**

**P**olice is the first respondent to Gender Based Violence (GBV) and Violence Against Women & Girls (VAWG). Their attitude and response can have a dramatic impact on developments, including the prevention of future violent acts and the protection of victims. The basis of Gender Responsive Policing (GRP) is an organizational strategy, which employs mechanisms to enhance the feeling of safety among women by providing them with better access to justice and security. There is an international consensus that the GRP is necessary in police and other security organizations. This is supported at the global level by the UN and International Association of Chiefs of Police.

In 2009, the United Nations launched an effort to increase its number of female police officers deployed with the United Nations. The goal was reaffirmed through the Security Council Resolution 2242 (2015), which mandates the United Nations to double its female police representation by 2020. Eight Security Council resolutions on Women, Peace and Security highlight the differential impact of conflict on women, men, boys and girls, and the necessity to mainstream gender perspectives into peacekeeping. Furthermore, Security Council resolution 2185 (2014) on policing in peacekeeping emphasized the promotion of

gender equality as part of a comprehensive approach to conflict prevention and long-term peace

The Police personnel should be sensitized to Gender Based Violence and other gender issues. It should not be forgotten that being a woman is not enough to understand the situation of women and female victims. It is also necessary to raise policewomen's consciousness on matters of violence against women and girls and GBV. Ironically, not all women are feminists and not all men are patriarchs. Therefore, mere recruitment — while being important — does not, automatically empower women in police and ensure gender mainstreaming.

Throughout the world, statistics from police departments show that women are severely under-represented in senior positions. In Pakistan, 6363, is the total number of women in the police from 15 organizations and 7 regions that makes up only 1.6 percent approximately of the total force. Gilgit-Baltistan with 183 police women has the highest percentage among the seven regions. The percentages of Punjab, KP, Balochistan, Sindh, and AJK & ICT are 1.8, 1, 0.5, 1.4, 1.5 and 2.8 respectively. The FIA with 205 women constitutes the highest percentage i.e. 11.4 among the 15 organizations. While acknowledging that the police sector is under resourced and overworked and the terror torn context of Pakistan makes policing a tremendously testing task here; the importance of community-centred and genderised policing should not be disregarded.

The structural inadequacy of police when combined with gender specific ineptness contributes to promoting support for vigilante. Luckily, the crimes of VAWG are no longer totally muted due to private media's ascendancy and a little impact of the decade long collective efforts of various stakeholders (activists, progressive elements in different governments, funding of donors/technical aid agencies and rights based non-profit organisations). However, in the absence of any authentic data on VAGW/GBW and official policy of using data for decision making, gender equality and empowerment are nothing but a distant dream for the majority of women in Pakistan including women in the police sector.

***The UN Security Council resolutions on Women, Peace and Security highlight the different impacts of conflict on women, men, boys and girls and the necessity to mainstream gender perspectives into peacekeeping.***

Pakistan with the Gender Inequality Index Rank of 143 out of 144 countries has been ranked the second-worst country in the world for gender inequality for the second consecutive year and is way behind Bangladesh and India which rank 72nd and 87th respectively. The police sector is most likely heading towards positive change due to some donor funded initiatives to transform from an 'abusive' force into a 'service' that is community oriented and gender responsive.

Police organizations in Pakistan are often the sites of hegemonic masculinity. The concept of hegemonic masculinity, formulated two decades

ago, has been defined by the Sociologist Connel, as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy in patriarchy, which guarantees the dominant position of men and the subordinate position of women. The political conjuncture and patriarchal consensus must not be overlooked in this scenario. The hegemonic masculinity in police culture, very often diverts if not excludes, the discourse on violence against women and influences the way policewomen deal with women and girls who are survivors of violence. Unfortunately, gender mainstreaming and equality are the least developed attributes of leadership and management and neither are they well defined aspects of the policy formulations in the police service of Pakistan.

The critical questions are; how to develop ownership from those powerful men to remove the kinks in engendered policing, how to use their cuff and clout for playing a strategic role and how to initiate a serious and sincere dialogue on potentially sensitive issues within the security sector hierarchy.

The number of women in police correlated to the success of GBV reports. If the police do not have enough female participation, female victims of GBV can be endangered.

*The writer is a gender expert, researcher, author & architect of the pioneering study on qualitative analysis of reported cases of violence against women in Pakistan*

**Published In The Daily Times, September 13, 2017**

**OP-ED**

## **Implementing Gender-Based Taxation**

The empowerment of women has emerged as one of the catchiest slogans and mantra in academia and activism. Feminisation of poverty, agriculture etc. and inclusion of women in the armed forces have occupied centre-stage in the empowerment hype.

Pro-women legislation, political participation and economic freedom have been repeatedly cited as the magic bullets for women empowerment. What exactly is women empowerment? What are the indicators of women empowerment? A wealth of literature is available and one can go on debating and deliberating but, to me, what matters most is: who are the women who benefit from such interventions?

Owing to the collective efforts of a relatively free media, rights activists, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and donors, gender-based violence has caught reasonable attention and new approaches to address centuries old crimes of dishonouring women through rape and other hazardous traditional practices are being adopted and applied. However, the focus remains on overt and easy to understand forms of abuses and injustices. Many complex faces of covert forms of violence and abuse against women remain unheard, unseen, unintelligible and thus hidden.

One such facet of gender discrimination and inequity is the taxation system of Pakistan.

Gender-based taxation has yet to gain consensus here from economists and policy makers. According to the works of many internationally acclaimed researchers on gender-based taxation as a potential tax policy, it has been underscored that female labour supply is more elastic than that of men. Therefore, tax rates on labour income should be lower for women than for men. This argument is well known in academic literature, but it is not taken seriously as a policy proposal. In Pakistan, with a repressive and anti-poor taxation system, the discourse and debate on gender-based taxation has yet to command the attention of policy makers and tax experts.

The key challenge, therefore, is how to translate ideas about the economic empowerment of women into policy actions through a tax-break. An instant solution seems to be the donor-funded initiatives implemented by many NGOs in Pakistan and even in the ministries and provincial departments. The question that bothers me is: are all women and girls facing similar disadvantages? The answer is a definite 'no', regrettably not so obvious at times even to gender professionals in Pakistan. Women are not homogenous, and a significant proportion has to live as divorced — with no support from the ex-husband.

Without going into the genesis of the pathology that causes inability to look at indigenous problems with our own lens rather than relying on visions elsewhere, I can safely state that in my two decades of practical experience in the development sector of Pakistan, I have yet to witness a single valuable intellectual

or service delivery product on the issue of divorced mothers and divorced women and those women who remain unmarried due to disability or dowry systems or any other social tradition. Though divorce is no longer an alien phenomenon in Pakistan, it is still seen as a hard to swallow reality and worth avoiding discussion if it is in favour of the divorced women.

There is absolute silence on the issue of divorced mothers. The agony and pain of this group accentuates with a rise in their educational qualification and salary earned. Society becomes more judgmental. Centuries old patriarchal traditions cannot be changed by the state alone but it can set guidelines and a direction for progress of Pakistani women and put policy reforms and institutional changes in motion.

In my pioneering research on the idea of a tax break for single women other than widows (as they are already exempted from property tax) in Pakistan, I found that the proposed tax break for certain groups of Pakistani women (divorced mothers, divorced, disabled and 'never married' women above the age of 40 years) can emerge not only as one of the means of freedom from the stigma and servitude for these women, but also allow sustenance to many women who are overworked and underpaid by diluting, if not dissolving, different layers of discrimination in a patriarchal society and culture.

One of the most frequent questions I faced while disseminating the idea was that why men belonging to this category should not be offered similar concessions. My answer has remained that ours is an unequal world where certain

groups are always 'more equal' than others. Women live longer but not necessarily happier and healthier than men. They not only carry the greater biological burden of diseases but the burden of family honour, and many forms and shapes of social disadvantages that are honoured and endorsed by cultural values, lack of political will and silence. Thus a woman who is not married (by the age of 40) due to disability or any other cause, or a woman who is divorced, and that too with children, has lesser probability and options for claiming the rights to be respected socially within the household and in public life, or getting married and settling peacefully. Obviously, there are class variations but women from the middle class bear the major brunt.

Setting up of a special dowry fund or distributing alms from some income support programme for such women may appear to be brilliant solutions but taking intellectual and political risks may appear non-pragmatic to the 'wizards' who are the self-appointed custodians of rights-based approaches. The least that can be done to alleviate the pain of such women is to extend the similar exemption of property tax that is given to widows and realistic tax breaks on income. The time to do so is now when the budget for 2011-12 is in the making.

Pakistan is a signatory to the Convention for Ending All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Three principles outlined by CEDAW are particularly relevant to gender equality and have been articulated in most Asia-Pacific constitutions. These are the state's obligation: the principle of equality and non-

discrimination. The state's obligation may be legally defined but also is a matter of political commitment and philosophy. According to a UNDP (2010) report, the "state should be an architect in eliminating gender discrimination, in law and legal practices rather than leaving it solely up to free market forces, for example, or the less predictable process of social change over time".

I hope that all those legislators and politicians from the PPP, PML-Q, PML-N, ANP and MQM who, when interviewed for my book, endorsed the idea of this specific tax break for stigmatised but skilled women in Pakistan will ensure that these women get this relief as a right.

One expected criticism could be that the Excise and Taxation Department may face a conflict of interest. Their function is to increase revenue. Yes, but usually taxation systems knowingly and unknowingly both are taxing the poor while the mighty evade taxes. Further, the estimated number of such women will not be high enough to diminish the revenue generated by these departments. Such a concession may encourage employers to hire such women.

*The writer is a gender expert, researcher, author & architect of the pioneering study on qualitative analysis of reported cases of violence against women in Pakistan*

**Published In The Daily Times, May 3, 2011**

**OP-ED**

## **In Praise of Capital Punishment**

**W**hat should be the approach of the advocates and activists for women's rights and gender mainstreaming in a society like ours where vulgar display of wealth (ill-gotten wealth most often) and power are normative and where people are respected for their positions, not strengths? The question has always been in my mind at different stages and phases of my career spanning over 20 years in the social development sector of Pakistan and some other countries in the patriarchal belt of South Asia.

I am speedily isolating myself from the 'Ivy league' of renowned activists and donor-dependent and donor-driven non-profits in Pakistan for the past two years on recognising the blatant discord between the idealism reflected in glossy reports in immaculate English and the practice of most of the key players in the sector. Therefore I do not intend to lament such successful players, as life has taught me that it is futile to question the process and ethics as pragmatism and popular wisdom are satisfied readily and conveniently by the product and obvious tangible gains.

However, what still bothers me and despite training my mind to become almost silent, I do question the relevance and effectiveness of some emerging trends, voices and demands in civil society (precisely speaking only some selected

NGOs) that are being disseminated through different channels and media forums as the collective vision of the entire civil society of Pakistan.

One such riddle is the issue of capital punishment for crimes (this is the only available word but that too is inadequate) to define the trauma, pain, stakes, notions of honour and much more associated with specified acts like rape, gang rape, incest, child sexual abuse and acid attacks.

It is indeed an excruciating experience for me to read and hear the apologetic perspectives and philosophies of some of the recognised champions of human rights, women's rights and child rights defenders not to promote the idea of the death penalty for the perpetrators of such crimes. Although the cost (social, emotional, psychological and physiological, not only for the direct victim as well as for the entire family) of those cannot be measured quantitatively but is definitely too high.

The opponents of the death penalty for such criminals are usually very well educated and belong to the elite classes of Pakistan or international technical and aid agencies working for Pakistan on issues of violence against women, girls and children (and who are mostly perceived as secular and liberal). They suddenly fit in a humane approach in the discourse on this issue while claiming in the same breath that they are not sympathetic to the criminals. Interestingly, if not ironically, they do not hesitate in quoting the holy books like the Quran, Bible and Gita for their pro-life arguments and that too inappropriately.

Since I am not a religious scholar, I would not comment on the teachings of these great books on such horrific episodes but my limited knowledge of religions makes me wonder why one needs to consult religion only when it comes to disadvantaged people, especially women and girls? Why are these guides not considered when wars are waged, bombs are dropped and or manufactured, arms are sold, nations are colonised, and harsh economic policies are adopted against poor countries by IFIs and so on and so forth.

Life is not black and white. It is pertinent to comprehend the grey areas and look for the context-appropriate options. It remains a fact that the efficacy of the law as an instrument of social change that in principle entails two interrelated processes, namely the institutionalisation and the internalisation of patterns of behaviour, is an established phenomenon in contemporary times. Still it is important to keep on reminding oneself that it is imperative not to see a law for the capital punishment for the murderers and perpetrators in rape, abuse and acid attacks as a magic recipe.

The death penalty cannot and will not put an end to such abuses/crimes/offences/acts of violence. Still, I insist and urge all movers and shakers in civil society and the legislative branches in Pakistan to adopt capital punishment for rapists, acid attackers and child abusers because this law is relevant in our society that has a very complex notion of honour and poor structures of governance. The death penalty in the specific social, economic and political

context of Pakistan should not be seen as a desire or urge for revenge. This law, far from being a reflection of societal realities, might be a powerful means of accomplishing reality — that is of fashioning it or making it. It will definitely set a precedent in our society where the law is not only the darling of the accused but the rule of law is nothing but a fairy-tale that has yet to be translated into a living reality, where poor parents of rape victims as young as six years have to ‘forgive’ the perpetrators and justice for a vast majority of the masses is a product to be dispensed only on the Day of Judgment.

*The writer is a non-elite gender expert, a violence victim turned survivor and Legislative Fellow US (2012)*

**Published In The Daily Times, April 21, 2016**

**OP-ED**

## **Intervention against Gender Inequality Needed**

*The power of patriarchy has to be contested with the power of empathy, reliable research and more responsible media*

Selective amnesia and apathy keeps the development business alive. Bonded labourers, maids, street children, transgenders, disabled, homeless, old, displaced and/or trafficked, people etc. remain mostly marginalised or missed out from the radar of mainstream programs in the society. In Pakistan, the injustices, discrimination and prejudices are affirmed through inaction towards recurring human rights violations taking place in the country.

These include discrimination of divorced women in the same taxation system that offers tax breaks to widows, dowry systems, stranded and abandoned Pakistani Biharis, terror attacks that target the Hazara community and the helpless widows of the victims, forced conversions of non-Muslim minorities, the issues of arsenic water and toxic food items, to name a few. Short-lived projects with empty slogans, funded by a donor, executed by a non-profit and endorsed by any public sector organisation, may feature some of these forms of violence in some specific geographical and contextual settings, only to be buried as a report later. It serves as a reminder

that some humans are always more equal than the others.

The campaign titled '16-days of activism', starting from November 25 till December 10, to confront Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), engages rights-activists, every year since 1991. It is indeed an energiser for the passionate campaigners who utilise this specific period to lobby and advocate for some public policies and programs that could tackle and terminate sexual and gender-based violence. However, at times certain choreographed activism presented in aristocratic settings seldom are meaningful to any woman or girl who is living below the poverty line in slums or struggling to get out of abuse in a middle class family. This brand of development continues to ensure privileged circumstances of many stakeholders.

Strangely enough, aggression, brutality and callousness are not always executed by any outsider, adversary or conventional criminal. Family members, friends and trusted figures in the community, are often the primary source of the violence that women, girls and children undergo. As compared to men and boys, women and girls are at greater risk of sexual violence, harassment and exploitation.

Globally, adolescent girls are particularly vulnerable i.e. more than one in four girls' first sexual intercourse is forced or coerced. The magnitude and manner of violence differs for girls and boys. Low education is one of the many risk factors causing violence, but school-related violence, according to the UN Women, is encountered by an estimated 246 million girls

and boys. In 2014, a study by Norwegian, Sociologist Heidi Bjelland concluded that whenever power is unevenly allocated in a relationship, the chance of physical and psychological abuse increases and high income or education works as protection against acts of violence only as far as the income and education does not exceed that of the partner.

Aggression, brutality and callousness are not always executed by any outsider, adversary or conventional criminal. Family members, friends and trusted figures in the community, are often the primary source of the violence that women, girls and children undergo

Abuses occur, at some point in the lives of 70 per cent of women by an intimate partner and 38 per cent are murdered. The rates of violence by an intimate partner range from 15 per cent in Japan, to 70 per cent in Ethiopia and Peru. According to WHO, 8,000,000, is the number of days of paid work women in the US lose every year because of the abuse perpetrated against them by their current or former male partners. This loss is equivalent to over 32,000 full-time jobs. It seems no society, social class; setting, sex and age group are immune from violence.

The ten best countries for women in terms of gender equality, as proclaimed by the Gender Global report of the World Economic Forum in 2017, in descending order are Iceland, Norway, Finland, Rwanda, Sweden, Nicaragua, Slovenia,

Ireland, New Zealand and Philippines. To develop this index economically, rich and poor countries are compared on equal footings and their gender-gaps are calculated in accessing resources such as education, healthcare and in opportunities to participate in political and economic processes. The countries at the bottom five of the list are Yemen (144), Pakistan (143), Syria (142), Chad (141) and Iran (140).

The sexual and gender — based Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) is a public health issue and infringement of human rights. The consequence of that the affected women and girls endure, also impacts the families, society, subcultures and ultimately the country in several structures, shapes and styles. The statistics on the endemic violence though limited and difficult to retrieve, are much required to struggle with their lessening and elimination.

Disadvantaged communities in Pakistan are incessantly paying the penalty of vulnerability. Programmatic engagements with visible involvement of multi-level stakeholders are weak in Pakistan. Deficient multi-sectoral and inter-sectional sectoral engagements are repeatedly failing to create sustainable solutions to prevent and prosecute violence. Inequitable attention, advocacy and activism govern the actions of the movers and shakers in the concerned quarters. Apathy has to be replaced by focused attention

towards neglected forms of the VAWG. Allocation of more resources including courage to expand research on the spectrum of violence should be a way forward. The power of patriarchy has to be contested with the power of empathy, reliable research and more responsible media. To silence the shocking statistics, the governments should take practical steps to end gender-based inequality.

*The writer is a gender expert, researcher, activist and a free thinker. She tweets @survivorwins*

**Published in the Daily Times, December 11, 2017**

## OP-ED

# Just Joking!

*In spite of being a feminist (straight and Muslim! Yes it is possible!) who often receives 'hate male' (I can and do laugh at this joke as well), I am against disciplining humour. However, it should remain healthy and not harmful*

Life may be rejoiced through charity, welfare, random acts of kindness, forgiveness, integrity and engaging in acts which inspire those around us. Among many ways of celebrating our existence on this earth, one of the easiest and inexpensive ways is to use humour to dilute, if not eliminate the ironies of life itself.

One of my favourite comedic writers, Mark Twain, braved many tragedies in his personal life. He was quite literal in his analysis that "Humour is mankind's greatest blessing." The role of humour in human health and happiness has always been a subject of interest in academia, arts, literature and entertainment. Humour's Hidden Power, authored by psychologist Nichole Force in 2011 made a good case that laughter really is the best medicine.

Do men and women differ in their humour or capacity to be funny? The answer may vary in different cultural settings. Psychology professor Robert R. Provine of the University of Maryland studied social interaction in various public urban spaces in 1993 and found that women laugh significantly more than men, and that both men and women laugh more at men than at women.

Although men consistently gain the most laughs, research has repeatedly shown men and women to be equally funny when it comes to producing humour.

While growing up in Zia-ul-Haq's intellectually stunted regime, I made fond memories of comedy on the only (state-owned) TV channel, PTV. PTV created some extraordinary comedies, like Fifty-Fifty. It introduced multi-talented women comedy legends like Zeba Shahnaz and Bushra Ansari. The male decision makers of PTV must be credited for having faith in the dividend of creating spaces for women in a stifling environment.

Unfortunately, female stereotypes are found in jokes all over the world. For example, 'A quiet man is a thinking man. A quiet woman is usually mad' or 'What books do women like the most? Their husbands' chequebook!'

***Law, personal values and common sense often construct an unseen code of ethics in humour for public consumption. Broadly speaking, there is no subject that is not inappropriate for humour.***

Law, personal values and common sense often construct an unseen code of ethics in humour for public consumption. Broadly speaking, there is no subject that is not inappropriate for humour. One most apt example in this regards is the Oscar winning Italian movie Life is Beautiful in which humour was employed to treat a subject as sad and sensitive as the Holocaust. The activist, author and clown doctor, Hunter Patch Adams (who became globally recognised in 1998, through the semi-

biographical comedy-drama film Patch Adams starring Robin Williams) treats his patients with humour. Hence, there is nothing depraved, gender insensitive and anti-feminist in humour and laughter therapy. Humour becomes questionable only when it is in bad taste and it is spiteful in nature despite having wit. Thus decency demands that racist and sexist jokes must be avoided. The psychological consequences of offensive lexicon are scientific realities. Their casual and careless use with women only reflects subtle misogyny. This does not stop here. The glossary of any language and dialect is full of homophobic and anti-women idioms, proverbs and similes besides association of swear words with womanhood. Any strong, stalwart and stubborn woman can be conveniently referred to with the B-word or diagnosed as a hysterical feminist. The impact of misogynist language resonates in biased public policies, cold shoulder welcomes to women in non-traditional sectors, castigation of victims of sexual violence, women legislators and politicians and so and so forth.

All work and no play is not even good for work and evidence-based research exists to prove more than two dozen health benefits related to humour and increase in productivity and performance through humour at the workplace. The same medicine can become a poison when packed in negatively styled communication and translates into harassment at work places.

Humour is traditionally seen a part of the male sexual armoury and they do have an advantage in humour too. Even liberated and

accomplished women (who are too few) and apparently modern men (who are always in a majority) in C-suits are enslaved by certain stereotypes.

An eminent entrepreneur Lynne Parker, the founder of Funny Women, who helps women to perform write and sell comedy, revealed research based information in her blog which said that female bosses are less likely to make jokes in the boardroom. When they did, more than 80 percent of their quips were met with silence. By comparison, 90 percent of jokes made by men were met with a positive response.

Jokes are needed in our nearly smile-free and freely frowned society where we never give up an opportunity to laugh at others and have practically stopped laughing unreservedly with each other and acquiring pure joy from in valuable things of beauty. Alas! Mistreating women through sexist language cannot be equated to ‘Just Joking!’

In spite of being a feminist (straight and Muslim! Yes it is possible!) who often receives ‘hate male’(I can and do laugh at this joke as well), I am against disciplining humour. However, it should remain healthy and not harmful.

*The writer is a gender expert, researcher, activist, a free thinker and a former PTV anchor for live morning and current affairs shows and producer. She can be reached at [dr.r.perveen@gmail.com](mailto:dr.r.perveen@gmail.com) or [Twitter@survivorwins](https://twitter.com/survivorwins)*

**Published In The Daily Times, November 15, 2017**

**OP-ED**

## **Misogyny Knows No Boundaries**

*To eradicate gender inequality, we need to review our own description and interpretation of self-images, challenge ingrained prejudices and prepare ourselves for a change by stepping out of our comfort zones.*

The respite associated with sexist language, objectification of women in their varied portrayals, free and ‘unfair’ use of male privileges, rape, acid attacks, dowry violence, son preference, incest, killing in the name of ‘honour’, human trafficking, bullying and harassment at work places of (even) women in leadership roles, under-representation of women in development and many other manifestations of gender-based violence are alarming contemporary realities.

The statements like “I am a happily married man who is obedient to his lovely wife” or “What are you talking about, violence? It doesn’t happen here as we men respect our mothers, daughters and sisters” often made by well-dressed men, with a grin, in different seminars, workshops etc. on women and rights related issues not only sound soothing, but effectively dilutes the seriousness of the ongoing discourse.

Although the deafening silence and denial of the exclusionary policies and abusive practices against women and girls have broken down to a certain point in most of the countries, misogyny

continues to cultivate in nearly all societies irrespective of their literacy prevalence, economic progress and overall freedom.

The media, music and management industries are full of men who have enough resources and energy to disparage and discriminate against women. Professor Berit Brogaard, at the University of Miami, raised a simple question in one of her research works *Romantic Love* (2015); is misogyny simply hatred toward women?” and found out that the answer is a loud and clear: no. A misogynist is not simply a person who hates women, it’s a person who does, or would, hate women who are not subordinate, women with power and status, women who can stand up for themselves and make their own decisions.

***There are misogynist women, too, who are regrettable sufferers of internalised sexism. The latter is defined as the involuntary belief by girls and women that the lies, stereotypes and myths about femininity that are delivered to everyone in a sexist society are indeed true.***

In 2012, following the rousing response of the first woman Australian Premier Ms Julia Gillard to the opposition leader for his repeated use of sexist language, in her speech, viewed by millions of people worldwide, Prof. Alison L. Booth, an Australian labour economist and novelist, observed that Australia’s Macquarie Dictionary updated its definition of the word ‘misogyny’, deciding that a modern understanding of this word would indeed imply ‘entrenched prejudice against women’ as well as, or instead of, the old definition of pathological hatred of them. There

are misogynist women too who are regrettable sufferers of internalised sexism. The latter is defined as the involuntary belief by girls and women that the lies, stereotypes and myths about girls and women that are delivered to everyone in a sexist society are indeed true.

Many women like myself who have been enduring burdens of child bearing and rearing (that multiplies when one is a single parent and immense stigma is added when one is single from other pathways instead of being a widow), unpaid labour at home and stressful and exploiting paid labour in formal economy must have seen women pitching against women; not ready to work for a woman on the pretext of their being difficult, psychotic, jealous etc. They must have also witnessed women not supporting other women, actively practicing 'victim bashing' and openly siding with powerful men in different case scenarios. Experiencing rejection of self as an individual, disbelief in one's own abilities and failing to examine oneself as a human being and a woman and not a mother, sister or daughter, are frequent private thoughts of many apparently emancipated women.

The challenges of misogyny, gender biases and internalised sexism are too many and multi-faceted. It seems that even today fundamental questions identified by Dorothy Sayers (one of the first women to graduate from Oxford) in her publication is relevant. It was: "Are Women Human?"

None other than one of most accomplished and brilliant women of present-day times Ms Sheryl Kara Sandberg, the chief operating officer

of Facebook and founder of Leanin.org, has taken notice of misogyny and declared that the more powerful a woman is, the less she is liked. She adds that, “For men, likeability and success is correlated. As they get more successful, more powerful, they’re better liked.” Sandberg has repeatedly spoken out about sexism in the workplace where a powerful man is called ‘confident’ but a similar woman is called ‘bossy’.

What (sensitised) women, men and transgender can do? The inevitable action to be taken is to review our own description and interpretation of self-images, challenge the ingrained prejudices and prepare ourselves for a change, meaning stepping out of the comfort zones as there is always a convenience in sticking to the subordination and popular wisdom.

Tail piece: The issues of Tran misogyny are too close to my heart and are deliberately excluded here for space constraints as they need to be understood in greater details.

*The writer is a gender expert, researcher, activist and a free thinker. She can be reached at  
dr.r.perveen@gmail.com*

**Published In The Daily Times, October 9, 2017**

**OP-ED**

## **Missing — Women in National Security**

*The non-inclusion of women in general and those from masses in particular in the portrait of the brass tacks of power, undermine our national security that is already experiencing destabilisation.*

The words of distinguished feminist international relations theorist, Ann Tickner, in 1998, “International relations is a man’s world, a world of power and conflict in which warfare is a privileged activity”; is convincing even today. Majority of experts in Pakistan do not look at warfare issues with the gender lens. A small number of highly placed Pakistani women in politics and civil service feel demoted if asked to look at a certain issue with gender standpoint until and unless there is any compulsion. This is in conformity with the popular worldwide assumption about the irrelevance of the complex roles of women in the theatre of International Relations.

The cautious women and conventional academia in Pakistan, remains largely unmoved by the UN Security Council’s land mark resolution 1325 in year 2000, and subsequent resolutions that continue to underscore the centrality of women in the realm of security. The country cannot afford to remain refractory to this alarming state of the affairs. Different public

universities should come together in strategizing how academia and the defence industry plan to better harness women's skills and utilise the insights of those experts, who understand the indigenous contexts, on engendered leadership in national security. Investing in nurturing a multiple and multilevel narrativisation on national security is worth doing.

Empowerment of women is one of the elements of power in national security. What is the position of women and those too powerless women, mothers who lose their children, widows and orphan daughters within such definitions and discourse about the national security? Should women be active contributors or passive users of the national security? Such queries have been residing in my mind for as long as my homeland has endured the war on terrorism. These questions have consistently troubled many hearts like mine that have wept non-stop, since the militant's attack on the Army Public School, Peshawar, on December 16, 2014. Nearly twenty million Pakistanis, that day, simultaneously realised that lightest coffins are heaviest to lift.

Owing to a combination of errors in civil military relationship, power equations and transformative changes in global power balance, the society in Pakistan has not only become violent towards women but also sexual, ethnic and religious minorities. The terror torn context has become too shallow and is existing with an accentuated intolerance. Difference rather than diversity is decipherable. A National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA) was set up in 2008 and is mandated to devise a counter-terrorism

strategy in Pakistan. It has recently sent a draft strategy of national narrative to the government for approval in order to deal with extremist ideologies. Reportedly, 18-month long stakeholders' consultations produced the draft. Such consultations must always be vast and the methods must ensure directness, inclusion of grass roots organisations and evident community participation; if the aim is to deliver a gender responsive and rights based strategy.

***National Defence University regularly organises annual 5-week intensive workshops with legislators, civil society representatives, civil servants and military officials.***

The security and equality of women is imperative in the security of the state itself. Introducing and integrating gender diversity, in making decisions, leads to better results. The non-inclusion of women in general and those from masses in particular in the portrait of the brass tacks of power, undermine our national security that is already experiencing destabilisation due to the religious divide, sectarianism, extremism and terrorism. The duty bearers may embark on a conscious effort to realise the relevance of engendering their respective sphere or at least animatedly work on regulation of the perception about the absence of the voices and views of women in the security space.

After more than 26 years of mostly learning experiences with emptiness of funds-dependent and funds-driven interventions, that too often create, speculation (no matter how undue it may

be), I believe that the national narrative/s on national security must be fully understood and owned by the country's public sector organisations. The visible participation of those women, who are direct right holders in security spectrum (and not those who are merely primary recipients of international funds), in national security policy, decisions making should be established as a standard practice as there are definite benefits and dividends in it.

National Defence University (NDU) regularly organises annual 5-week intensive workshops with legislators, civil society representatives, civil servants and senior military officials to dispel myths and build harmony on national security. The NDU could take a lead role by establishing a think tank that can engage with women and other marginalised groups of Pakistani citizens on different dimensions of national security. This must happen with speed, right intentions and visionary leadership, otherwise the catastrophe to be caused by the radicalisation of academia, emotionally disturbed population due to traumas of death, disability and displacement caused by insecurities and escalating militarisation within women, is the writing on the wall.

According to SATP, the largest website on terrorism and low intensity warfare in South Asia, our country coped with 62586 (33794 terrorists/insurgents, 21947 civilians and 6845 armed forces personnel) casualties between 2003 till November 5th, 2017 due to terrorism. Pakistani women like women elsewhere have the potential to enrich humanitarian assistance, ripen peace talks and toughen peacekeepers'

endeavours. The recognition of this veiled power of women and the gender-alert peace management by the pertinent organisations would be a game changer in the security landscape of the country.

*The writer is a gender expert, researcher, author, activist and a free thinker. Twitter handle@survivorwins*

**Published In The Daily Times, November 13, 2017**

**OP-ED**

## **Needed — Law Against Dowry**

*The reasons for the absence of a tough and acclaimed anti-dowry law could be attributed to an elite patriarchal harmony and an organised protection of corporate interests*

**D**owry-related violence that was defined by the UN in 2009 as “any act of violence or harassment associated with the giving or receiving of dowry at any time before, during or after the marriage,” gets, regularly confused with and eventually covered in domestic violence. It is indeed, unquestionably different from the former in that the husband may not be the only perpetrator of dowry-related violence or death. In-laws, former spouses, or fiancés may also execute dowry-related violence. The traditional demonstration of dowry-related violence is battering, acid throwing, nose-chopping, amputation of limbs and bride burning. The social pressure, economic abuse, psychological quandary and broad compromises on the rights of women and her personal and familial resources, structure, partially concealed and revealed viciousness.

In Pakistan, where sex-selective (usually backstreet) abortion is also opted because sons are considered assets and daughters a liability and the bearer of heavy honours, the institutionalisation and internalisation of dowry

assigns a diminutive footing to the girls right from the prenatal stage. The tribal custom, vulvar (bride-price) where observed, too is harmful. It not only belittles the position of the women but leaves many young men unable to get married at the right age and/or with the woman they desire.

Some relatively pro-women laws especially in Punjab are among the new and positive political realities of our turbulent homeland. However, there is no dowry violence-specific law as yet. The existing Restriction Act 1976 about bridal gifts and dowry restriction is not only unsatisfactory but also impractical. In a society where surreptitious wealth is almost a norm and tax payers are too few, imposing a ceiling, on marriage expenses, dowry and or gifts make this law (that like any other law cannot be automatically effective) even more challenging to implement. The bridal gifts and dowry must be seen and treated differently.

In the past 10 years, some pathetic attempts to upgrade the legislation about dowry in different legislative assemblies of Pakistan, remained futile and relatively unobserved even by the media that we call 'free and fair'. The reasons for the absence of a tough and acclaimed anti-dowry law could be attributed to an elite patriarchal harmony and an organised protection of corporate interests. Some evidence of this attribution comes from pre-determined donor agendas, prevailing culture of pretention and greed, glorification of the vulgar display of wealth and power in our daily lives, festivities and even mourning, promotion of extravagant weddings through morning shows and insensate advertisement on TV channels.

Therefore, the research-based advocacy, informed activism and lobbying for strategies to address the issue of dowry (an apparently benign and beautiful tradition but actually a form of human rights violation and gender violence against women, men and families), often gets elapsd or eclipsed in mainstream initiatives on gender equality, feminism, women and human rights in Pakistan.

***The Restriction Act 1976 about bridal gifts and dowry restriction is not only unsatisfactory but also impractical. In a society where surreptitious wealth is almost a norm and tax payers are too few, imposing a ceiling, on marriage expenses, dowry and/or gifts make this law even more challenging to implement.***

The legislative impact of an anti-dowry law keeps on receiving callous criticism. There is a strong resistance and backlash against the anti-dowry law even in India and Bangladesh where dowry violence is wide-spread and where there is at least recognition at the state-level that it is a tangible exploitation that brings torture and even death to the women.

The obvious and hidden patriarchs and champions of hegemonic arrogance in social development either remain silent spectators on the inept legislation or attempt their best to ensure that a potent anti-dowry law never gets materialised in Pakistan. The vanity and or misappropriation of any friendly women and gender responsive legislation must not be taken as an excuse to bulldoze the law or never let it be

enacted. Dowry-less marriages are difficult but possible.

The dowry-custom should not be legitimatised by Pakistani elites, media, and intelligentsia, merely on the popular wisdom that dowry is a form of social security for the women. The dowry violence is not comprehended correctly in the official reports of the concerned organisations in public sectors and civil society. The limited capital is exhausted on documentaries, theatres and case studies to establish it as the distress of the domestic servants and masses. The home-grown, movement/s (if any) on human and women rights are by and large administered by non-profits that in turn are reliant on international donors who are never informed influentially about the peculiarity and prevalence of dowry violence in Pakistan.

While exploring the *raison d'être* of the dearth of due consideration to this right-based wrong, one cannot disregard the waning intellectual strengths and seriousness and simultaneously accentuating apathy of the affluent of many of our honourable legislators and policy makers. Despite all odds, many passionate, unpaid activists and awakened dreamers, continue to believe in the miracles of legislation and political will. Hence, they would continue to struggle for a Pakistan that is characterised, not by the Socio-legal approval and unawareness of this gender violence (maximum in its magnitude as marriage remains a must to enter institution) but a

Pakistan that is accredited for its judicious standpoint on dowry in law.

*The writer is a gender expert, researcher, free thinker and a campaigner on dowry — violence since 1994. She can be reached at [dr.r.perveen@gmail.com](mailto:dr.r.perveen@gmail.com)*

**Published In The Daily Times, October 30, 2017**

# Of Stigma, Schizophrenia and State

Stigma is beautiful, -this was my first thought when as a high school student I first “dissected” a flower and our Botany teacher told us that this is stigma- part of the female reproductive part of a flower.

Throughout my life I deliberately tried to remember the anatomical and botanical interpretations of stigma and abstaining from knowing, acknowledging and exploring sociological aspects of this concept (or curse).

However, as I turned forty, I decided to challenge myself and face this culturally defined and socially endorsed stigma- the stigma faced by a vast majority of divorced women in Pakistan irrespective of class, education, economic status and religion (whether divorced by the husband or compelled to seek ‘khula’).

Though divorce is no longer an alien phenomenon in Pakistan but still it is seen as a hard to swallow reality (as evidenced by the practice that even very secular and modern Muslim families leave the right to divorce in ‘Nikha Nama’ unattended or decide otherwise) and worth avoiding discussion if it is in favour of the divorced women.

Laws, access to justice, interpretation and application of laws (family and or *Shariah*) are anti-women in general; thus keeping alive Zia`s legacy (barring few pro women bills passed by the National Assembly in recent years, ceremonial gestures by the public sectors and mixture of

indigenous and donor driven and funded advocacy drives by leading players in the NGO sector).

There is an absolute silence on the issues of divorced mothers. The agony and pain of this group accentuates with a rise in their educational qualification and earned salary. The society and system become more and more judgmental. No record is readily accessible or available on number and other details of divorced Pakistani women, even in leading women focused non-profit, development agencies and the Ministry of Women Development. However, data, from randomly selected practicing lawyers suggest an alarming increase in the divorce rate in Pakistan of 170 million people, which has a middle class of 30 million.

Women make nearly 50% of our total population. So it is obvious to an empathetic mind, heart and soul that women and girls cannot be ignored from any process that affects the national economy. What is more important to realize and admit is that these women are not homogenous and a significant proportion has to live as divorced with no support from the ex-husband (another unfortunate interpretation of religion).

The state cannot change the mind-set of people that is based on centuries old patriarchal traditions.

However, what state can do is to give evidence of its own mind set by adopting certain practices through policy reforms and institutional changes.

**Some suggested priority actions are as follows:**

1. Divorced women must not be required to:
  - Submit their divorced papers at the time of applying for any government job,
  - Submit the proof of custody of children and divorce papers for obtaining passports,
  - Submit the details of a child's father at the time of admission in the school-a mother must be recognized as the official guardian and all correspondence should be in her name.
2. Divorced women may be recognized a special category and all public sector adverts may contain this statement that qualified divorced women are encouraged to apply.

In late 2006, the FBR estimated that there were almost 2.8 million income-tax payers in the country. Federal budget 2008-09 envisaged 20 per cent increase in the number of taxpayers and an increase in the tax-to-GDP ratio is being witnessed.

According to Mr. Muhammad Faiyaz Khan, Director General LTU (large tax payers unit) Karachi, taxes are imposed by the government not only as a means of collecting revenue, but also as a tool for fiscal policy. The implementation of this policy makes the tax calculations very complicated and tax rules highly complex. No wonder physicist Albert Einstein has said, "The hardest thing in the world to understand is income tax." Divorced women especially mothers may be given special concessions in taxation (women are getting in general on the basis of

income but tax system does not recognize divorce women's plight separately).

The time has arrived when the state has to demonstrate its consciousness towards this issue; what is the choice; to tolerate Stigma founded on myths and misunderstandings, that can direct discrimination against many women or to take the courage of adopting certain measures that can prevent the society from harbouring the stigma towards divorced women, and ultimately contributing towards an increased number of schizophrenics.

**Published in The Daily Times, January 4, 2010**

**OP-ED**

## **Rethinking Our Approach as a Nation**

*As a nation, country and state — if we want to ensure basic needs including justice for our people, we have to rethink the way we think*

**G**ender inequality refuses to go away in education, health and all economic sectors. The economic indicators of Pakistan in the first half of FY17 suggested that pressures are mounting upon both fiscal consolidation and external balances. Pakistan adopted a revised methodology to measure poverty and a new poverty line in 2016 that resulted in 29.5 per cent in FY13/14 as compared to 64.3 per cent in FY01/02. However, the basis in the said decline is not completely understandable.

The report on Global Gender Gap by the World Economic Forum records the steps forward in Economic Participation and Opportunity, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival, and Political Empowerment, of 144 countries. In 2017, it has again ranked Pakistan the second worst country on gender equality. That Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan) ranked 47th position and India ranked 108th after dropping 21 levels, compared to its previous position is big news for us here in Pakistan.

What is the relationship between decision makers especially politicians and of pain? Why does someone's pain get special status and

significance while the pain of millions is ignored, missed out or completely forgotten? Why is the manifestation of pain, as a marker or crisis affecting millions, fails to persuade the power elites to revisit or rethink about their policies and practices? These questions are yet to be answered by Google with the precision of the right proportion.

The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Pain has documented a number of philosophical and scientific questions about pain. The literature addressing such questions is huge and still rapidly growing. All questions are either yet to be researched or command the attention of the researchers.

***The statistical picture of Pakistan, through UN agencies and the IFIs, illustrates that in the South Asia region, the country is the lowest performer on human development indicators, especially in education.***

The statistical picture of Pakistan, through UN agencies and the IFIs illustrates that in the South Asia Region, the country is the lowest performer on human development indicators, especially in education and stunting. The cost on health, nutrition, and education, now totalling 3 per cent of GDP, is notably lower than most other countries. The net enrolment rates in education have been escalating in Pakistan but still lag behind other South Asia countries. The expenditure on health as percentage of total government expenditure is only 4.7 per cent. No data is available for maternity protection i.e. the compliance with international labour standards. Total expenditure on health per capita is 129\$

and total expenditure on health as percentage of GDP is 2.6. Only 31.3 per cent of births take place in baby-friendly health facilities. 22 per cent of population is undernourished and the 'bread basket' got 107th position out of 118 developing countries on global hunger index. Nutrition remains a noteworthy cross-cutting challenge, as 44 per cent of children under five are undersized. The female labour force participation rates in the region are lowest in the region.

Life has taken me to difficult and remote areas; from Gangchay District, the easternmost district of Gilgit-Baltistan to Gwadar, the port city on the southwestern coast of Balochistan and many valleys, villages, towns and cities from Khyber to Karachi. I witnessed people drinking jet black water from sources shared by animals as well. I searched (in vain) for a ladies' rest room in the decent and grand public sector organisations. I have seen families taking women in obstructed labour or men with terminal illness, through narrow valleys, on foot, selling their cattle or exchanging their daughters for the transportation costs. Prostitution is prohibited legally but its prevalence can never be questioned.

The plight of children, divorced women, single mothers, disabled people, jobless youth etc. do not appear as the statement of problem until and unless there is a donor funded project spending more on pleasing the government officials than actual service delivery.

Business meetings and vacations are conveniently muddled up and respect for tax payers' money is not entrenched in our culture. Mega corrupts are respected, feared and enjoy

freedom of all sorts. I also belong to Islamabad, the capital , that now harbours, nearly 46 slums and has been seeing children searching food from the garbage dens (even in the posh sectors). The world of politics in Pakistan mirrors all moments of human nature, like elsewhere but the irrational glory it has attained is definitely outstanding.

Why does unfairness not provoke pain that could shatter the iron nerves of our politicians? Why does human misery not constitute a mass trigger? Why do people not express their disapproval against their mortification? Why are voices raised and heard only for selective causes for selective victims? Why have our legislators never delivered the fiery speeches to ensure implementation of fundamental rights of people?

The naivety of such queries does not necessarily nullify their relevance. If we as a nation, country and state want to ensure basic minimum needs including justice, we have to rethink the way we think. We, the citizens are not the subjects; have to hold accountable the politicians and bureaucrats who are appointed to serve the public. We have to demand the politics of truth and not of alternative facts. We must abstain from selective aggression, advocacy and activism.

*The writer is a gender expert, researcher, activist and a free thinker. She tweets at @survivorwins*

**Published In The Daily Times, November 27, 2017**

**OP-ED**

## **Sexual Harassment at Workplaces**

*A number of organisations claiming to be progressive let bullying and harassment go unnoticed*

**E**motional abuse and humiliation are forms of workplace bullying and harassment and are found in nearly all countries. No site including cyberspace is immune from the unwanted aggressive behaviour; observed or perceived power imbalance. These distress signals often seen as the 'feminist concerns' are undeniable in Pakistan as well.

Direct and indirect bullying with verbal, physical, relational and property damages are found not only in children's' schools or colleges but also at the modern workplaces, where legally adults with promising potentials and impressive CVs work in responsible positions. The preponderance of this gender based violence is high even in mechanised countries like US, UK, etc. Some bullying actions can fall into criminal categories, such as harassment, hazing, or assault. Bullying in comparison to harassment is even more difficult to establish and criminalise.

Pakistan has an anti-harassment law; The Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act 2010, that functions in a weak system and does not robotically make harassment against women or other people an

easy case to win. However, it reflects good judgment of the State and the sagacity of its civil society. There are three Ombudspersons, one in the federal area and one each in Punjab and Sindh to process appeals and even direct cases of sexual harassment under the law. Each province has a Provincial Implementation Watch Committee, facilitating and monitoring compliance in their respective provinces.

According to rights activist Maliha Hussain of Mehargarh, the law in Pakistan is being implemented in all sectors in an organised manner, but a lot more work needs to be done on it. The number of cases in the last seven years in which Mehargarh was directly involved is over 3700, where only six reported cases were with mala fide intention and about 8 that were not managed properly, meaning that 99.63 per cent of cases were handled in a very responsible manner. The harassers involved, were either punished or both parties compromised. Significantly, 3 of them were reported by men, one against another man and two against women.

***There is no magical recipe for positive, pro-women, disadvantaged-oriented, equality-centred transformative change. No policy, programme and project will be victorious without the buy-in and support of the majority (who are men) in any organisation.***

A number of organisations claiming to be progressive also let bullying and harassment go unnoticed. Having worked for over two decades directly with the destitute and the dominant notables both, I can safely and responsibly, state that hounding occurs in nearly all organisations.

Exceptions aside, a vast majority, especially women (even the aware and educated ones) do not have the social power to disclose any incident of overt and covert maltreatment at work place. The number of unreported cases is always much higher than the actual incidence. The outcomes of the reported cases are also not always very optimistic. Rarely any organisation seeks to reckon why there is no case reporting, whether all employees are working in a fear-free environment or not, and how to report a case against the top boss or those who are politically and socially well connected? The victims especially women in such situations face multi-faceted trauma, due to the loss of livelihood, credibility, self-esteem, the fear or fact of being distrusted and maligned and the compulsion of hiding.

The prudence, of many creditable humans, disintegrates, in many deceptively decent work settings. The abusive social power assorted with the moral break down on the other side ultimately becomes unacceptable, perilous and very often lead to their decision to exit. The health experts urge that if one feels like ones corporation turns blind eyes to or backs bullying and or harassment, the best option just might be to quit.

The resolute and valiant activists around the globe are campaigning that it is worth thinking what bullying and harassment are, how these work in the workplaces and what the unlawful and unethical male entitlements are, so women can understand how to protect themselves. It is imperative for all, especially women who work in formal structures to contemplate on these issues and never get contented that such accidents

happen in the reports of foreign-funded projects or with “bad women/people”.

The loss of collective morality, culture of violence, greed and flattery and subservience to the powerful, the personal interests of those in the decision making corridors and an attitude to prefer personal networks over merit, very often impede things. Therefore, the gap between *de jure* and *de facto* constitute the deplorable and scary reality spectrum.

There is no magical recipe for positive, pro-women, disadvantaged-oriented, equality-centered transformative change. No policy, programme and project will be victorious without the buy-in and support of the majority (who are men), in any organisation.

Some fundamental questions in our context could be; what are the hindrances in the advancement of gender mainstreaming in our society? Who is responsible for cultivating a gender receptive and responsive work culture in the work places? Why Pakistan, in spite of its well-articulated constitution and Islamic identity that underscores human equality, dignity of work and privileges for women could not create a trust in the public spaces and work places for women? These presumably byzantine inquiries call for meticulous soul searching.

*The writer, a gender expert, researcher, author, activist, free thinker is also a victim turned survivor who could never report the harassments she faced at work places. She can be reached at  
dr.r.perveen@gmail.com*

**Published In The Daily Times, October 23, 2017**

## OP-ED

# Social Entrepreneurship

*What distinguishes social entrepreneurs from business entrepreneurs — even from socially responsible businesses — is adoption of a mission to create and sustain social value*

The peculiar context of Pakistan, where the COAS has to make public the seriousness of illness of economy (perhaps economy is too serious a matter to entrust to economists in civilian governments) and where a vast majority of Pakistanis are always fooled with fabricated figures and exploited with unfair taxation system; makes social entrepreneurship not a social nicety but a technical necessity.

Civic or social entrepreneurship is a concept that is seen as instrument of change in policies and economies across the regions in this uneven corporatised world.

Since the volume of capacity and cash targeting is increasing, social entrepreneurship is on the rise in capitalist economies and in our country too. However, the increasing popularity has linear relationship with the uncertainty about what exactly a social entrepreneur is how it functions.

Social entrepreneurship has been a case study of identity crises and endured the challenges in attaining a clear definition, therefore it appears that on a practicing level, it still remains unclear. Consequently, the CSR, NGO-isation of social development,

commissioned consulting, business incubators managed by private and elite academia, commercial accelerators, social business and philanthropy; all get conveniently categorised as social entrepreneurship.

***Women are almost twice as likely to reach the top ranks in social enterprises as they are in mainstream businesses and more than 90 per cent of companies that focus on tackling social problems have at least one woman on their leadership team.***

What distinguishes social entrepreneurs from business entrepreneurs, even from socially responsible businesses, is adopting a mission to create and sustain social value. According to the late Prof J. Gregory, social entrepreneurs play the role of change agents in the social sector, by recognising and relentlessly pursuing new opportunities to serve that mission engaging in a process of continuous innovation, adaptation, and learning, acting boldly without being limited by resources currently in hand, and exhibiting heightened accountability to the constituencies served and for the outcomes created. This means that the social entrepreneurs are a rare breed.

Like men, there are ambitious women too. Many smart women are ready to undertake the additional roles of visionaries, leaders and innovators besides being nurturers in social occupations and are creating success stories. Social entrepreneurship can be one of the effective ways to achieve economic empowerment of women in general and survivors of violence in particular who gain financial and social

independence by investing in their technical skills.

Women are almost twice as likely to reach the top ranks in social enterprises as they are in mainstream businesses and more than 90 per cent of companies that focus on tackling social problems have at least one woman on their leadership team. Yet the profession is continuously being projected as the second class business category as it is more or should be more focused on creating and scaling up social good rather than monetary profits.

Former Chilean President Michelle Bachelet in her address at the 2012 Social Enterprise World Forum in Rio de Janeiro, bluntly declared “women are natural social entrepreneurs”. Ironically, the women who produce more than half of the world’s food and control about \$20 trillion in consumer spending, experience relatively high exclusion in shared economies. Centuries old patriarchal barriers and gender differences remain almost unshakable in social entrepreneurship as well. How even most intelligent and competent women are pushed aside in a male dominated society is not a secret.

At times I really get worried about the un-estimated damages that are and would be caused to genuine women social entrepreneurs in Pakistan, who endeavour to carry on without push of the class and pull of the benevolent sexism. The person who does not know the nuts and bolts of social entrepreneurship and yet is trying to introduce oneself as a social entrepreneur in elite forums, academic circles, development sectors or obtaining high profile

awards through an inherited family business is definitely not a social entrepreneur. The relevant UN agencies, universities and technical aid agencies must take notice of this casualness and review their in-house practices and parameters as well.

In my modest capacity as a generation X civic entrepreneur, I would like to remind all young people especially women to learn to be patient, humble and remind themselves that successful founders and entrepreneurs are made through their ability to execute hard work by using the head and empathising with the identified social problem. Working smarter is advantageous but working harder is never out of fashion. The predisposition to get spoon fed, connected to high profile ones in an instant and paid -projects bound innovation in influential academia are detrimental to the institutional and technical sustainability of social entrepreneurship and spiritual growth of the entrepreneur.

The entrepreneurial success, sense and sensation are connected to the comprehensive context of a country. A report of the international Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) Project concluded that the correlation between the level of entrepreneurial activity and economic growth is greater than 70 per cent; all nations with high levels of entrepreneurial activity have above average rates of economic growth; and economies with higher rates of entrepreneurial activity are stronger and more competitive.

Pakistani civilian government can benefit its economy and blend happiness of people with financial stability through transparently

regulated social entrepreneurship. The core conditions for this require intellectual risk taking and integrity. However, in a society where conflicts of interests are lawfully ignored, this becomes very tricky and testing.

*The writer is a gender expert, researcher, activist, Ashoka Fellow and a free thinker. She authored "Successful Social entrepreneur-heart and head together". She can be reached at dr.r.perveen@gmail.com*

**Published In The Daily Times, October 16, 2017**

## **OP-ED**

# **South Asian Women in Politics**

*The women in politics in South Asia (like elsewhere) have to face patriarchal attitudes and arrangements. They usually receive limited support from civil society groups and seasoned parliamentarians.*

**S**outh Asia has had eminent women politicians and office bearers. The world's first woman prime minister was from Sri Lanka who was elected in 1960. The first woman prime minister of the Muslim world was from Pakistan and was elected twice.

Bangladesh, Nepal and India have had women head of the states as well. Maldives is an exception as women are banned from holding the highest leadership positions of president and vice-president in the country. Afghanistan is a new democracy and has reached 28 percent in terms of women representation in the parliament. Nepal is the only South Asian country that has 33 percent women legislators. In spite of this legacy, the authority of a vast majority of South Asian women as voters and leaders remains a distant dream.

The women in politics in South Asia, like elsewhere, have to face patriarchal attitudes and arrangements. They usually receive limited support from civil society groups and seasoned parliamentarians in politics. The framework of

the electoral system may not always match the needs of the women candidates. The exposition of shrewd patriarchal accord among political parties is not incomprehensible. Those who run for the seat frequently materialise it through the boost and the blessings of their Godfathers and pedigree. Women regardless of their eloquence have negligible say during discussions on important matters within their political parties. The women legislators thrive as male proxy and their power extension.

A social transformation mainstreaming the marginalised issues is often allied with women's share in politics. Currently, there are 11 women heads of the state, 53 women speakers of parliament and 158 women deputy speakers of parliament. Women ministers in 186 countries hold 1237 portfolios. The Nordic countries have highest percentage (42 percent) of women in single house or lower house. The percentage of women in combined houses in descending order is as follows; Americas (28 percent), Europe including Nordic countries (27 percent), Europe excluding Nordic countries (26 percent), Sub-Saharan Africa (24 percent), Asia (19 percent), Arab States (18 percent) and Pacific (18 percent). The political parity will not be achieved in the world until 2080, markedly, making equivalence in politics an insurmountable hindrance.

The participation of women in politics was not a priority till 1975 (in spite of the adoption of the Convention on the Political Rights of Women by the UN in 1953), when at First World Conference on Women in Mexico City, the UN reminded of the inequalities suffered by women. Then women

accounted for 10.9 percent of parliamentarians worldwide and 42 years onwards out of 46143 parliamentarians, while women make 23.38 percent of the parliamentarians. In 1990, a resolution of the UNESCO, recommended that the proportion of women in leadership positions should reach 50 percent by 2000 and the term 'critical mass' was used to refer to this proportion, estimated to be at least 30-35 percent.

A social transformation mainstreaming marginalised issues is often accompanied with women's greater role in politics. Currently, there are 11 women heads of the state, 53 women speakers of parliament and 158 women deputy speakers across the globe.

Women with political offices generate a general enthusiasm. The women in the parliaments of Pakistan have contributed towards convincing legislative business. This is also owed to the support for selected issues by the donors and their local implementing partners. Pakistan, with 21 percent in lower and 18 percent in upper house, ranks 92nd in the list of 193 countries, compiled by the Inter-Parliamentary for 2017 on women representation in the House of Representatives.

The conflicting gender gaps in the country with better ranking in political representation of women, however practically, falsify the premise of weakening of patriarchal culture. I came to know through my professional interactions that many women legislators are unaware of their due rights or have wilfully given up those rights e.g. share in the inheritance.

Most of the women legislators are neither attentive (during the domestic and international capacity building forums funded by international organisations) nor empathetic towards disadvantaged women, and same is the case with their male counterparts.

All political parties are more or less the same because they are merely concerned about serving their own interests. The hungry, homeless and humiliated masses will continue to applaud and vote for a typical ruling class that is oblivious of the rights of the deprived segments.

The relevance of instituting a system that compliments intellectual strengths, education, meritocracy, transparency and disparages glorification of patriarchy, extremism and corruption has to be internalised by the women in politics and parliaments. If they really want empowered women voters and leaders, they have to challenge, candidly the existing criminal patriarchal and elitist consensus. Pakistan needs a critical mass of competent women, who can step out of their comfort zones and fulfil their mandate.

*The writer is a gender expert, researcher, activist and a free thinker. She tweets @survivorwins*

**Published In The Daily Times, December 25, 2017**

**OP-ED**

## **Struggles of Soldier Women**

*Equal opportunity for women in uniform with equal ability is no longer a fairy tale.*

Is it more risky to be an unarmed woman battling different forms of injustices and inequalities or to be a warrior woman? An official one at the front lines who not only has to fight the enemies of her country but also the sexism within the command?

Women are not completely protected from violence in households or workplaces either. They become even more vulnerable to abuse in humanitarian settings including conflicts. Verifiable data and anecdotes testify that in such times there is a prevalence of trafficking, rape, sexual slavery and forced marriages associated with certain terrorist groups.

At times army men are implicated in rape and there is no deficit of such instances that are often camouflaged as psychological warfare. In 2015 German journalist and historian Dr Miriam Gebhardt Asserted in her book, *Als die Soldaten kamen* (When the Soldiers Came), that members of the US military alone raped as many as 190,000 and German women were raped by all four victorious powers at the end of World War-II. That was an ultimate tale of the treatment meted out to the defeated women of Nazi Germany, upon which they remained mute for decades out of shame and humiliation. "Rape was used as an instrument of war in Kosovo," reported Human

Rights Watch in 2007 and qualified that those were not occasional incidents committed by a few crazy men.

In the nonexistence of a utopian world where people do not abhor and slay each other over different ideologies and piece of land; the world has come to terms with the idea of peace keeping forces and official armies of the state. Women who have been seen and accepted as nurturers and part of care economy are now persuaded to be a part of military by international frameworks and UN resolutions. Women have been recruited not only as nurses, medical doctors, engineers and allied services providers but also as pilots, marines, and combat soldiers. Women have graduated from *Cantinières*, the women who were responsible for preparing meals in the French army in the 1800s and the comfort women (mostly Korean, Chinese, Japanese, Taiwanese and Filipino), who were forced into sexual slavery by the Imperial Japanese Army in occupied territories before and during World War-II to women with formal ranks in the army.

***Women have been recruited not only as nurses, medical doctors, engineers and allied services providers but also as pilots, marines, and combat soldiers.***

More than 150 people provided stories from their deployment for the Times that compiled in 2014, an informative and thought provoking piece based on those responses. Ms. Diana Kramer's response, "My male counterparts were deemed competent and capable until they proved otherwise, where on the other hand it was often assumed that I was incompetent until I proved I

was not.” was closest to my own observations and I can confidently state that women in all professions, especially the non-traditional ones irrespective of their other identities, can instantly connect with the reply.

What is the situation in our homeland? Pakistan is the only Islamic country to have women appointed in high ranking assignments and the general officer ranks. It would be interesting and informative if employment policies for women and identification of any challenging cultural issues for the army may be made public and discussed with diverse stakeholders for the sake of further improvement. In 1949, prominent states woman and former First Lady of Pakistan, Begum Ra'ana Liaqat Ali established her own Pakistan Army Women National Guard with combat courses. She was the unit's first GOC and controller with the rank of an honorary Brigadier. In 2006, the first women fighter pilots batch joined the combat aerial mission command of the Pakistan Air Force. Women are yet to be part of combat missions and the submarine force command of Pakistan Navy but they are serving in operations. Gender issues in our military, in the context of its true history and structure needs to be understood. *Sexing the Soldier, The Politics of Gender and the Contemporary British Army*, by Rachel Woodward and Trish Winter could be a good inspiration.

The strength and stamina of women in armies has also been questioned with a special reference to Infantry. The Infantry finally got its first woman graduated from the infantry officer course of the

Marine Corps in the US in 2017 and whose name was not made public on her own request. In a continuously changing world, the only constant, it seems remains the position of women if not their condition. Soldier women, undeniably, have to correspond to the military readiness and effectiveness. Unlike many women parliamentarians who are male surrogates, in countries like ours, Armies cannot back such women. Without compromising on professional standards, women in armies have the right to survive and thrive in a system that is well equipped with their strategic and practical gender needs.

Equal opportunity for women in uniform with equal ability is no longer a fairy tale but a challenging target. In spite of structural and symptomatic resistance, women are being allowed to serve in different military services and are being upgraded as well. Worldwide, militaries are still, hyper masculine institutions. The equality stance is erroneously used very frequently instead with semblance among sexes and beating merit. Rights based activists have to remain vigilant regarding creating enabling environments for inclusiveness and advancement of women under brass ceilings and in barracks.

*The writer is a gender expert, researcher, author,  
activist and a free thinker. Twitter  
handle@survivorwins*

**Published In The Daily Times, November 19, 2017**

## OP-ED

# The Forgotten Biharis

***The raped Bihari women and stranded families were neither an invented story nor collateral damages. They are real humans who must be remembered, respected and rehabilitated.***

*“Thousands of families of ill-fated Muslims, many of them refugees from Bihar, who chose Pakistan at the time of the partition riots in 1947, were mercilessly wiped out. Women were raped, or had their breasts torn out with specially-fashioned knives. Children did not escape the horror; the lucky ones were killed with their parents”, says Anthony Mascarenhas in a newspaper article titled ‘Genocide’ published back in June 1971.”*

In the recent history of our own homeland the story of the Bihari women, who were raped during the carnage of 1971 is shrouded. The saga of their sacrifices, their surrender to patriotism and their humiliation as community is obscured. It is taxing, tiring and tricky to fathom the melancholy of an ancestor who coped with two migrations — one in 1947 and second time in 1971. To evade a special and communal mourning for 46 years is arduous.

Biharis are the Urdu-speaking people with many having a native proficiency in Bengali language as well, who got settled in the former eastern wing of Pakistan after migrating from India in 1947. They maintained a pro-(West)

Pakistani stance, supported the Pakistani armed forces and also opposed the separation of the eastern wing. Hence, when conditions leading to the making of Bangladesh ripened, they faced vengeance from Bengali mobs and militias. An estimated 1,000 to 150,000 people were killed. Many married Bihari women and single girls were abducted and sexual assaults including rape.

In the aftermath of the Dhaka Fall on December 16, 1971, 300,000 Biharis who escaped from becoming the prisoner of war and mob killings were stranded in one-room houses as stateless refugees, as the planes that were supposed to take them to Pakistan never arrived. In 1978, the Pakistani government stripped stranded Biharis of their Pakistani citizenship. Nearly 100,000 of them still live in horrifically rotten camps.

The honourable Bangladeshi Supreme Court did rule that Biharis were eligible for Bangladesh citizenship in 1972. After all these years, some of them have still preserved their Pakistani passports and identity proofs. The Red Cross facilitated the initial repatriation of a few thousands to Pakistan that was ultimately interrupted due to the reluctance of Pakistani authorities. General Musharraf on his visit to Bangladesh while in office as President of Pakistan, rightly apologised for the atrocities in 1971. He took a morally bold step in 2002 by stating, "Your brothers and sisters in Pakistan share the pain of the events in 1971. The excesses committed during the unfortunate period are regretted. Let us bury the past in the spirit of magnanimity. Let not the light of the future be

dimmed.” That admittance probably did not envelop the rape of Bihari women and guarantees of return of the citizenship to the unfortunate patriotic people.

***Rape in times of wars is one of the ways of violently achieving strategic social, economic, political and military objectives. In modern times, scores of activists, psychologists, and scholars have broadly admitted this strategic rape theory.***

Different documents enclose haunting and heartrending narratives on the most brutal acts of war rape against unarmed women of Sierra Leone, Liberia, Bosnia, Guatemala, Yugoslavia, DRC, and Myanmar besides many developed countries. Rape in times of wars is one of the ways of violently achieving strategic social, economic, political and military objectives. In modern times, scores of activists, psychologists, and scholars have broadly admitted this strategic rape theory. The study of deviant dealings, like involvement of civilians and soldiers in mass murder, the backing of mass bloodshed by the elected leadership, incrimination of victims of rape, culture of absolution for perpetrators etc. has also engrossed researchers.

The subject of the state-regulated gender identities and their legitimisation by the elites was dealt by Dr Bina D’Costa in 2011 with a critical feminist perspective in her book ‘Nation building, Gender and War Crimes in South Asia’. ‘Women, War, and the Making of Bangladesh: Remembering 1971’, a book by Prof Yasmin Saikia, in 2010, describes how the war is viewed in the three countries; Bangladesh, India and

Pakistan. It is remembered as the 'war of liberation' for Bangladesh, for India, a triumphant settling of scores with Pakistan and in Pakistan, it is an act of betrayal by the Bengalis. According to Saika, Pakistani and Indian soldiers and Bengali militiamen raped and tortured women on a mass scale. Pakistan's narrative is given in the book 'Creation of Bangladesh: Myths Exploded' that was published in 2016. The author, Dr Junaid Ahmed, a Pakistani scholar lost his family members including parents, in the mayhem of 1971. What remains elapsed is the bearing of a complex continuum of sexual violence on Bihari women and their successive generations who lost their self-esteem.

The international law took its first notice of war rape, in 1949, with the Article 27 of the Fourth Geneva Convention that explicitly prohibits wartime rape and enforced prostitution. The embargoes were reinforced by the 1977 Additional Protocols to the 1949 Geneva Conventions. However, judging rape as a war crime and crime against humanity is a relatively recent forward move. The rampant rapes of women in the former Yugoslavia in 1992, obtained the thoughtfulness of the UN Security Council thus affirming on 18 December 1992, that "massive, organised and systematic detention and rape of women, in particular Muslim women, in Bosnia and Herzegovina" as an international crime that must be addressed. The formation of International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda was after the rape of 100,000 and 250,000 Rwandan women in 1994. The Rome

Statute of the International Criminal Court, in force since July 2002, includes rape and any other form of sexual violence as a crime against humanity when it is committed in an extensive or systematic way. The case of raped Bihari women has yet to be accessed by the international laws.

The raped Bihari women and stranded families were neither an invented story nor collateral damages. They are real humans who must be remembered, respected and rehabilitated. They should be our official reminders for the validity of peace and call for righteous measures. Our leadership has to take an intellectual risk. Wounds are healed through closure not concealment. The calling of our destiny guides must include consoling of Bangladeshi and Pakistani women who lived through the era of 1971.

*The writer is a gender expert, researcher, activist and a free thinker. She tweets @survivorwins*

**Published in The Daily Times, December 4, 2017**

**OP-ED**

## **Time to Wake Up About Abuse**

***Dedicated to the forgotten Uzma Ayub, who at the tender age of 15, was abducted and gang-raped, allegedly by policemen, got pregnant, gave birth to a girl, was broadcast shamelessly by some sections of the media and some activists, before being sent back to her hometown in KP.***

*A complex issue like Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation (CSAE) can't be solved until the public at large take interest in it. Unfortunately, the efforts required in policy making on this issue in both the public and private sectors are extremely lacking. The outrage that has currently gripped the Country, actually exposes the corrosion of our integrity as a society, as well as a state.*

**The media frenzy on the rape and murder of six year old Zainab in Kasur has caused, is certainly a shock. Despite having been an activist for several years, I have never seen such protests organized by individual activists, alliances or NGO's against human right violations and sexual and gender based violence. Since I'm a relatively new user of social media, I am also amazed to see the number of keyboard warriors this issue has attracted on cyber space.**

I would like to share a few things I have learnt, both through my professional life and as my

ordeals as a young girl in this highly misogynistic country.

Firstly, Pakistani languages, including Urdu, do not have any words for terms like incest, rape, abuse, paedophilia, counselling and empathy. If there are any such words, most of the country is not aware of them. This lack in vocabulary contributes to our collective denial and behavioural patterns, which endorses the abuse of women and children. On top of that, these limitations of language make the simple act of filing a police report for such crimes unnecessarily tricky.

Secondly, keeping silent about violence and abuse should be seen as violence itself. Owing to the decades long struggle of certain passionate activists and cause-centric non-profits like Rozan, SACHET, Sahil, SPAARC, Bedari and Ahung, silence about sexual abuse has been broken at different points in time in different geographical settings. It would be unfair not to acknowledge the support of some progressive duty-bearers within the government apparatus in different regimes and financial support of some international aid agencies. The positive contributions of civil society actors must not be forgotten and any future strategy should be based on best practices.

***Pakistani languages, including Urdu, do not have any words for terms like incest, rape, abuse and paedophilia. This lack in vocabulary contributes to our collective denial and behavioural patterns, which endorse the abuse of women and children. Additionally, these limitations of language***

***make the simple act of reporting such crimes unnecessarily tricky.***

There is a complete absence of any sort of support system for the survivors of abuse. The stigma attached with disclosures of sexual abuse needs to be discussed by all the stakeholders involved and society at large. This would require carefully challenging this region's approved notions of honour. We are living in a society where young girls including mentally or physically disabled girls are frequent targets for sexual assault. Those who conceive as a result of rape often go through multiple abortions (known as D&C). The culprits usually are often the girls own fathers, uncles, brothers (real ones included) and other revered figures in the family. Rape remains one of the rarest crimes to be proven in a court of law. Hassle-free access to police, lawyers and courts is another issue here which merits a separate article.

The vast majority of the people in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan claim to be religiously devout, but life in this country has taught me that very few people in this country are truly God-Fearing. Islam's religious edicts regarding humanity and mercy are widely ignored and violated. Power-structures and a patriarchy-friendly interpretation of religion, law and culture are valued and imposed. Sins and corruption does not embarrass the vast majority. In most cases, this majority is only worried about defamation and other consequences attached with their being caught committing these sins. Thus our political elites keep the masses poor, ignorant and helpless.

Sexual violence against women and children are endemic in Pakistan – the sooner we accept this, the better! The hypocrisy of those who matter has reached new heights in the wake of the latest Kasur tragedy. But can this be a new beginning and a new opportunity to ensure the protection of our women and children?

*The writer is a veteran journalist and the recipient of the PTV Award of Excellence in 2001. She has also won the Fatima Jinnah Award for Social Work and was the first woman anchor for live morning and current affairs shows on PTV*

**Published in The Daily Times, January 18th 2018.**

## OP-ED

# Understanding Child Abuse

*“With child abuse people are divided. They either see it under every stone or they do not think it happens at all. Oliver Twist may help people face up to child abuse or keep their minds open to it. Oliver Twist is a ‘textbook of child abuse’.”*  
Consultant Paediatrician. Patricia Brennan, UK.

Child abuse and neglect, as per the definition provided by WHO, includes all forms of physical and emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect, and exploitation that results in actual or potential harm to the child’s health, development or dignity. Within this broad definition, five subtypes can be distinguished: physical abuse; sexual abuse; neglect and negligent treatment; emotional abuse; and exploitation. The challenges of drawing the line between physical discipline and child abuse are being debated in US and other developed countries. An American sociologist Simon Finkelhor known for his research in Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) uses interpersonal victimisation a therapeutic term in conjunction with CSA. To him, the physical abuse of children, although technically criminal, is not frequently prosecuted and is generally handled by social-control agencies other than the police and criminal courts.

In 2002, WHO estimated that globally at least 150 million girls and 73 million boys under 18 years had experienced forced sexual intercourse or other forms of sexual violence involving

physical contact? Statistics show that females are much more likely than males to develop PTSD as a result of experiencing child abuse. The highest rates of sexual abuse are found among children who have reached puberty or adolescence and in most places, boys are the victims of beatings and physical punishment more often than girls, while girls are at higher risk of infanticide, sexual abuse, and forced prostitution, educational and nutritional neglect. The exact magnitude of this violence is unknown but it remains a fact that all children are at risk. The Journalist's Resource US, reported a 2009 study (to deal with the relative lack of consistent data) to estimate an 'overall international figure' for such abuse. It found that the highest prevalence rate of child sexual abuse geographically was found in Africa (34.4 percent), Europe showed the lowest prevalence rate (9.2 percent), America and Asia had prevalence rates between 10.1 percent and 23.9 percent; for women, seven countries reported prevalence rates above 20 percent: and the generally much-lower rate for males may be partially inaccurate.

It is worthwhile to recognise the attributes of the abusers. The perpetrators of child abuse (an act of commission) and neglect (an act of omission) are most often the child's own parents. Those who molest children look and act just like everyone else. People who sexually abuse children can be found in families, schools, madressas, streets, parks, shrines, and places of worship, sports clubs, and any other place where children gather. Significantly, abusers can be and often are other children. About 90 percent of children

who are victims of abuse know their abuser. Only 10 percent of sexually abused children are abused by a stranger. Approximately 30 percent of children who are sexually abused, are abused by family members. As many as 40 percent of children who are sexually abused are abused by older, or more powerful children. A minority of perpetrators can be the past victims as well; a phenomenon known as the cycle of sexual abuse.

Approximately 30 percent of children who are sexually abused are abused by family members. As many as 40 percent of children who are sexually abused are abused by older, or more powerful children. A minority of perpetrators can be past victims as well; a phenomenon known as the cycle of sexual abuse

In year 2016, Pakistan's Senate passed a bill that for the first time criminalised sexual assault against minors, child trafficking and pornography. The recent widespread revealing of child abuse in Pakistan owes its life to the heartrending incidence of the captivity, rape and murder of the 7-year old girl from Kasur (while her parents were away to perform Umrah, a short pilgrimage to Mecca and Madinah, and she was residing with close relatives). Our ill-equipped police and blundering systems of governance have suddenly become newsworthy. The free and fair (read private) Pakistani TV channels are mourning the death of the unfortunate minor, with music and poetry. The airing of cultural anxiety of the self-styled moral brigades and vulgar verbosity of the politicians from treasury as well as the opposition benches demands condemnation from the social critics and

activists. The dynamics of representation and reception of child sexual abuse phenomenon and associated fascin-ation, eroticisation and politicisation caused enough discomfort and displeasure to the followers of ethical media. Witnessing the activism of sitting parliamentarians in candle vigils is nothing but a comic relief and ironic in politest words. I dare not to go further in documenting the dearth of any dull moment in my beloved country where many legislators and government officials are not reluctant of running non-governmental organisations and are openly ridiculing the laws of the land.

It is time to admit the collapse of our institutions and hollowness of our culture and social values. All Pakistanis are in dire need to believe that Sexual Violence, a gross violation of children's rights occurs in every country and child abuse does take place in all families, tribes, clans, regions and social classes of Pakistan. There is no singular and instant solution to end the CSA but its prevalence rate can be reduced through sensitisation of parents, teachers, students, media professionals, police, judiciary and legislators on sexual health rights. This needs continued, coordinated, rational and sincere actions that have nothing to do with the so-called morality, religiosity, spirituality and rituals. The question is who can offer such an immaculate leadership?

*The writer is a gender expert, Public Health Specialist, researcher, activist and a free thinker.*

*Twitter handle@survivorwins*

**Published In The Daily Times, January 15, 2018**

**OP-ED**

## **Violence against Women in Pakistan-So What?**

*Besides being a fundamental violation of human rights, violence against women represents one of the most critical public health challenges and is a major factor contributing to poverty.*

The magnitude of violence against women (VAW) has reached alarming proportions in the country. Social endorsement of VAW reflects in the heartless response many provincial assemblies and our national legislative bodies have adopted over execrable and horrendous cases of VAW. The reaction of many parliamentarians to the shocking incidents in Balochistan is a case in point: a few male legislators tried to justify burying women alive in the name of tradition in 2008, and a majority of men and women legislators remained silent on the issue, with the notable exception of the Sindh provincial assembly, which passed a strongly-worded resolution against the incident. Particularly threatening is the widespread prevalence of physical violence. The statistics of reported cases of VAW epitomize the ugly face of a society deeply mired in the vicious cycle of violence based upon gender discrimination.

The issues of violence experienced by poor and socially disadvantaged women and girls remain unheard or unnoticed. Even if they are

documented, they suffer from the elitist and patriarchal consensus of forgetfulness, marginalization and selective prioritization of issues in violence.

Without attempting to oversimplify an issue as complex as VAW in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, which has, on record, 24,119 reported cases from the past three years, I would like to draw the attention of the readers towards some basic understanding.

What is violence against women? Lorie Heise, an internationally recognized authority on violence against women, defined it in 1994 as any act of verbal or physical force, coercion or life-threatening deprivation, directed at an individual, woman or girl that causes physical or psychological harm, humiliation or arbitrary deprivation of liberty and that perpetuates female subordination.

According to the UN declaration on the elimination of violence against women, the term 'violence against women' includes any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.

Hence VAW includes battery, sexual abuse of female children, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, violence related to exploitation, non-spousal violence, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere,

trafficking in women, forced prostitution and violence perpetrated or condoned by the state.

Besides being a fundamental violation of human rights, VAW represents one of the most critical public health challenges and is a major factor contributing to poverty. Consequently, to achieve most of the UN Millennium Development Goals, violence against women and girls must be reduced and prevented.

To any sensitive soul and empathetic mind, it is perfectly legitimate and logical to believe that VAW in Pakistan is a burning issue and its elimination must be the focus of attention for legislators and donors. VAW occupies a central position in noisy activism within the local NGO sector and adds the flavour that influences the ratings of certain talk shows on private (also known as independent) TV channels. Apparently sensible and high-powered decision making bodies consider it an even greater misplaced priority in a disastrous situation.

One of the conclusions of my study on gender based violence, which has recently been published by USAID under its gender equality program, is that a vibrant NGO sector exists in Pakistan and a lot of emphasis appears on women and gender issues that are treated almost synonymously. However, as far as the funding initiatives specific to VAW are concerned, the information and interventions are fragmented, scanty and marked by lack of coordination.

Overall capacity to implement, operationalizing and raise awareness levels regarding VAW is still very low and a strong need for policy advocacy is urgent. Coordination of

responses to VAW in various directions, at all levels, is weak, and the women's movement driven by civil society organizations (CSOs), mainly NGOs, is imperceptible if at all coordinated, and its members are at times in competition with each other for scarce donor resources.

The critical question is: is VAW a genuinely priced priority in the agenda of the development sector and free and fair judiciary in this Islamic republic, or is it merely a catchy and catty slogan to gain media attention and fulfil the technical obligations of donor and development agencies?

Such write ups are made impressive, moving and convincing by inserting academic theories, shocking numbers and/or heart wrenching stories. I intend to do none of these. Experience has taught me that the power of compassion has its limitations, and in this corporatized world, all that matters is the economy.

There are at least over 50 donors present in the country, including multilaterals, bilateral, UN agencies and independent international CSOs that have been shaping the face of aid in Pakistan over the last few decades. According to a donor mapping study undertaken by DFID Pakistan in 2007, the largest share of the budget among international donors belongs to the two main multilaterals, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the World Bank.

The bilateral manage the remaining share of funding space in the country at 25 percent of the total financial aid, while the UN agencies comprise two percent of the total aid share. Some high-quality research done locally has clearly

pointed out that the principal stumbling block to achieving women's fundamental rights to life, liberty and security remains discriminatory laws and harmful traditions/customs sanctioned in the name of Islam!

So what is the cost of VAW and can this cost be calculated in isolation from certain critical determinants of the well-being of a society and maturity of a state? I certainly do not have definite answers but I am sharing two quotes from two male scholars and academicians from two different cultures and time zones who, to the best of my knowledge, were never a part of any NGO for women's rights and liberation.

“They (women) are therefore placed at the service of their husbands and (relegated) to the position of procreation, for rearing and (breast) feeding. But this undoes their (other) activities. Because women in these states are not being fitted for any of the human virtues, it often happens that they resemble plants. That they are a burden upon the men in these states is one of the reasons for the poverty of these states” — Ibn Rushd, 1126 to 1198, better known in the Latin West as Averroes.

“Almost all Muslim societies have elite regimes that perpetuate their rule and their privileges through lies and hypocrisy. We harp upon the glory of Musawat-e-Mohammedi [PBUH], but our societies are ridden by a range of cultural, social, economic and political inequalities. We ritually observe Imam Husain's example of holding on to principles even at the cost of his life, but routinely sacrifice principles for the sake of petty material gain. Our leaders

orate about the rule of law, human rights and democracy, but these are merely subjects of drawing room discussions and political speeches by politicians and generals. Pledges are made about poverty eradication, but all anti-poverty programmes only enrich the already rich” — Dr Kaiser Bengali, well known Pakistani economist in a local English daily, November 28, 2001.

*The writer is a violence victim turned survivor,  
researcher and non-elite gender practitioner*

**Published in The Daily Times, September 10, 2011**

## **OP-ED**

# **Violence against Women**

***When women are raped, harassed and assaulted in the bedroom, boardroom or in the battlefields, they have to bear the burden of proof and contributory negligence.***

**E**quality of all human beings before law, within constitutions, for accessing health and education, for having choices in their personal matters like marriage, birth spacing, sense of dressing, choice of careers etc., for being able to sustain themselves and in remaining safe from being trafficked, smuggled and becoming another statistics in a terrorist attack appear too unadorned, bald-faced and non-controversial. However, the fuss, fret and frown set off, if one just swap the word human beings by women. In an instant the kinetic energy of the centuries old patriarchy, in most of the globe starts showing its impressions. Understanding the scope, scale and spectrum of gender based violence and talking about, it is an urgent and inevitable need of our times that aims for a planet 50/50 by 2030 through the Sustainable Development Goals.

The trials and tribulations for most of the women, irrespective of their social class, nationality and vulnerability remain endless.

According to the World Health Organisation, about 1 in 3 (35 percent) women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner's violence or non-partner sexual

violence in their life time with enormous social and economic costs.

Women cope with numerous forms of biases and brutality resulting from dogmatist interpretations of religion, radical academia, bigot bureaucracies, partisan police, constrained prosecution and hypocritical societies. The competent and competitive women play against pay gaps and glass ceilings in the corporate sector and brass ceiling in security sector. When women are raped, harassed and assaulted in the bedroom, boardroom or in the battlefields, they have to bear the burden of proof and contributory negligence. They are too often considered ineffectual enough to bear the responsibilities of family property and business and either denied the due share or under benevolent sexism is persuaded to relinquish the power of attorney to the male in the family.

**According to the World Health Organisation, about 1 in 3 (35 percent) women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their life time with enormous social and economic costs.**

Involving men in devising realistic strategies to institutionalise practical mechanisms to combat it, is inescapable in Pakistan that has been again ranked as the second worst country on gender equality in the Global Gender Gap index of 2017.

In Pakistan, women in different geographical belts, tribes, clans and families face specific forms of violence due to the certain forms of cultural practices like child marriages, *Watta*

*Satta* (exchange marriages), *Paitlikhi* (when a marriage is decided even before the child is born), dowry-violence, *Vulvar* (Bride-Price), *Sawara/Vanni/ Badl-Sulah* (when a girl/woman is used as an exchange good for the dispute settlement) etc. The parallel justice system (*Panchayat, Jirga*), still very successful and patronised by a sizeable power elites, not only permits these perilous cultural practices but has the impudence of conferring orders for 'honour' killings, forced marriages, rapes and gang rapes. The girl child is usually not celebrated when born and given the status of a burden and even her mother is tortured, thrown out of home, divorced for giving birth to her, but the same poor creature is readily send to cities in pre-teens to work as a slave in rich households and support the family, residing in the small towns, urban slums and far flung villages.

A woman remains a good woman in the conventional sense only if she chooses silence while dealing with all forms of abuses she is met with, whether it is a childhood sexual exploitation and/or sexual harassment at the workplace. The moment she tries to escape a violation of her basic human /religious/ constitutional and or legal rights, she suddenly becomes a pariah. If a woman, that too a mother steps out of an abusive marriage, not only her family contempt the determination but legal procedures make every attempt to effectively make her doubt her decision and loathe her courage.

If she survives this test of nerves and gets a divorce she has to live with a stigmatised status. If she is an earning hand and is also a tax payer,

she finds out that if woman is a widow, she can get a tax exemption on her property but not with a divorced status. If she is a widow she receives uncalled-for sympathy and scrutiny. Many a times she is forced to get married to a mismatch that could be even her younger or much older brother-in-law.

The states and societies struggle to prove to clasp the Egalitarian principles of the fairness and equality of all citizens with cognitive biases that may or may not be perceptible.

Discriminatory knowledge, attitudes, behaviours and practices are endemic. How does a state respond to prevent and purge gender inequity; craft a concrete change? This response is echoed through laws, rule of law, commitment of the legislators with human and women rights, gender sensitive police actions, gender responsive judiciary and public policies.

Empowerment of women does not happen with a few privileged women making headlines or some transforming into influential. It happens when ordinary women feel empowered enough to take their own decisions and do what they please.

*The writer, a gender expert, researcher, author, activist and a free thinker Twitter@survivorwins*

**Published In The Daily Times, November 6, 2017**

# Change: Through the Gender Lens

*In a social milieu defined by patriarchy, it is unsurprising why like most other laws, the taxation laws too are ambiguous, unfair, and gender-blind when it comes to women* By **Dr Rakshinda Perveen and Adnan Rehmat**

They say that people who complain about taxes can be divided into two classes: men and women. But jokes aside, the system of taxation of eligible citizens in Pakistan manifests generally the same approach as most policies on other subjects that deal with the state's primary responsibility towards the welfare of its subjects: inadequate levels of exclusivity, ownership, relevancy, fairness and benefit. Pakistan's taxation system does not embrace a satisfactorily nuanced system of identification and categorisation among potential taxpayers. For all practical purposes, it shifts the burden on the taxpayers mainly according to their incomes and ability to pay. Little consideration is given to social inequities and deprivations made worse by a non-enabling environment for probably the most outstanding category of eligible citizens: women. While unacceptable in the casual formality of the rigid tax laws, it is not surprising. In a social milieu defined by patriarchy and men-friendly interpretation of the state religion, which permeates all aspects of life, it is unsurprising why like most other laws the taxation laws, too, are ambiguous, unfair, unrepresentative and

gender-blind when it comes to women. Eligible women For the Federal Bureau of Revenue, the motto simply is "we've got what it takes to take what you've got" -- not for them is to differentiate among taxpayers apart from their incomes. For instance eligible women income and wealth taxpayers are considered a homogenous group that will pay up upfront or, like most taxpayers, do their best not to. No allowances for special treatment are made for sub-categories of eligible women taxpayers in Pakistan who face difficult social and cultural impediments in situations that men, in similar circumstances, almost always don't: single parents, divorced, unmarried (particularly those over 40 years of age when it becomes very difficult for this status to change) and physically challenged (mostly due to medical conditions). Some also struggle, in addition, to hold on to what little property they have but may not have the money pay regular taxes. It is precisely due to this pointed lack of emphasis on sub-categories by the taxation authorities that it is difficult to find verifiable statistics of the numbers of women in Pakistan eligible to be taxpayers. FBR is silent on how many women pay how much in taxes each year. Or what women get in return for paying taxes. Even the non-tax officialdom is less than efficient about precise figures for the number of divorced women in any given year. The last national census -- conducted in 1998 -- indicates that in the then population of 145 million, at least 3.4 percent of women in the 40-45 age bracket never married (3.3 percent in the rural areas and 3.7 percent in the urban), 6 percent were widowed (5.8 percent rural and 6.5

percent urban) and 0.7 percent were divorced (0.7 percent rural and 0.7 percent urban). Considering that women's life expectancy is barely 70 in Pakistan -- this easily projects into over a million women aged 40 or above who have never married, are widowed or are divorced. Not all of them were, or are, engaged outside their homes for gainful employment. But those that are, and may potentially be tax eligible, easily run into hundreds of thousands at any given instance. Where are taxes that pay? What little concrete data in the larger picture perspective that is available, is enough to back up the claim of non-existent support or facilitative systems or non-exploitative mechanisms when it comes to taking taxes from women but being proportionate, if not over-compensative to women by making it worth their while to pay taxes. According to the UNDP Human Development Report 2009, Pakistan ranks 141 out of 182 countries on the Human Development Index; 124 out of 182 countries on the GDI (Gender Development Index); 99 out of 109 on the GEM (Gender Empowerment Measure) and 101 out of 182 countries on the HPI (Human Poverty Index). This, according to *Sinf Surat*, a think channel based in Islamabad that promotes dialogue on the neglected faces of gender inequity in policies, society and development strategies, is a double jeopardy for Pakistani women: first their share in GDP growth is not valued and their contribution to labour and level of effort in such key areas as agriculture and urban-based industry and business is not acknowledged. But when it comes to paying taxes, the principle of equality is applied

without the concept of equity. Although women play an active role in Pakistan's economy, their contribution is widely acknowledged to be grossly underreported. Even so, the World Bank's reports of 1997 stated that women constituted 28 percent of the country's labour force. The 1980 agricultural census stated that the women's participation rate in agriculture was 73 percent. The 1990-1991 Pakistan Integrated Household Survey indicated that the female labour force participation rate was 45 percent in rural areas and 17 percent in the urban areas. Taxonomy of justice it is difficult not to acknowledge the changing demographics, economic upheavals and social and cultural transformations in Pakistan. More women are joining the work force. Even from sketchy data it is clear that divorce rates --, and therefore --, households with women single parents are increasing. For example, despite its small size -- its population in 1998 being 0.6 percent of the national population -- Islamabad's percentage of divorced individuals stood at 0.26 percent of its population in 1998. This is the second highest in the country after Punjab, the most thickly populated province where the numbers were 0.45 percent. And yet, says Malik Mukhtar, an arbitration council official in Islamabad, only 10 percent of the divorce cases are documented. The under-registration of divorce also results from customary practice; marital dissolution is traditionally an informal process and it is *de facto*, not *de jure* -- divorce which is the norm in the case of male initiated divorce, leaving women to usually fend for themselves economically. The Islamabad

Arbitration Council divorce registers indicate the number of divorces increased threefold in 2005. Significantly, female initiated divorces rose from about 20 percent of the total in 1995 to 48 percent in 2005. So, how does one deal with a more humane view of women having to pay taxes while balancing it with the need to get as many tax rupees from all citizens irrespective of gender to run the country? One solution is what's called the "Ramsey taxation principle", which states that a good whose demand (or supply) is more elastic -- i.e., responsive to prices -- than another one, should be taxed at a lower rate. The reason is that the more responsive the equilibrium quantity of the good is to prices, the more the tax distorts the allocation of resources. When applied to people, this principle is proven by econometric studies: women's labour supply is more elastic to wages than that of men, as is the case in Pakistan. So if we were to increase taxes for men and reduce taxes for women, the increase in female labour supply would be larger than the fall in male labour supply. In short, a good tax goal could be to achieve equality between men and women by first allowing women to pay lower taxes than men until 'equality' is achieved. When that goal is reached, the affirmative action gender tax can be removed. Taxing policies, not women Says the UNDP: "National economic policies and plans need to recognise the roles and contributions of men, women, boys and girls, and address their needs equitably. However, even gender-responsive policies and plans often fail to improve gender equality and empower women because insufficient resources are allocated to implement

them. Although resources alone will not achieve gender equality, ensuring adequate financing is a necessary step. While taxes are a key source of financing for such initiatives, tax reforms can increase the tax burden on the poorest women, and at the same time fail to generate enough revenues to fund programs needed to improve their lives. Gender-responsive planning and budgeting ensures that fiscal resources are generated and allocated in a way that affects women and men equitably." That includes taxation eligibility and taxation. As the tax reforms in Pakistan move forward (slowly, more than surely), it is time to think about women. It is time to go beyond rhetoric. Those who manage generation of funds and architect public policies must revisit the structure of taxation with a gender lens and apply such factors as costs of stigma, discrimination and social poverty faced by women who are divorced and/or single mothers, or those who never get married because of various reasons. This is not an argument to abolish taxes on eligible women taxpayers in Pakistan; it is an appeal to make the tax codes on them representative. Taxes women pay should distinctly improve women's lives. Because taxes are the key source of revenue governments themselves raise, understanding the nature and composition of taxation and current tax reform efforts is the key to reducing poverty, providing sufficient revenue for public expenditure, and achieving social justice, in particular for women. In Pakistan, to date, no specific intervention has been directed towards examining the gender implications of the existing taxation rules, culture

and practice. It is time to change this. More and more Pakistani women who are divorcees and/or single mothers, unmarried women (above 40 years in particular) and those physically challenged who go about with dignity and take care of themselves and their families deserve better from the state.

**Published in The News (The News on Sunday),  
November 15, 2009**

## **POLITICAL ECONOMY:**

# **Child Labour: Thinking beyond Empty Slogans**

Child labour has been adopted as a trendy agenda in Pakistan by the mushrooming NGO sector and the NGO-trained public sector. Child labour is a multi-dimensional issue and the organizations involved in condemning it have their own perspective, objective and interests. With no intentions of demystifying this complex issue, one would focus on the difference between child labour and child work and the possible consequences of deliberate or unapprised exercise of the two terms interchangeably.

Child labour reflects the violation of child rights leading to exploitation and deprivations of all kinds. Child work reflects social inequity and insecurity, dearth of social safety networks, magnitude of health and education and financial independence. Is it right to confuse the two states or situations? Is it cogent to advocate the eradication of child work? Have the development pundits ever thought of the catastrophe or tragedies bound to materialize due to the horrendous perplexity of a misnomer? One does not need to work with for a foreign donor funding to undertake any complex research to answer these questions. One only needs to look deeper and listen carefully to the sounds in one's environs to seek answers to such questions.

The maid servant of the kids of a number of well-to-do families is a child girl. The boy looking

after many household chores in our huge villas is often a child. The workshops for our cars are reliant on a mechanic who is the well-known Chhota. These chhotas are also serving tea and snacks in tuck shops either by the roadside or inside any college or office canteen. Who are these children? Are they child labourers or child workers? All of them hail from poor families with more mouths to feed than hands to earn? Are not these children, who are putting so much sweat for large families to survive, a personified violation of human rights and a big slap on the face of our socio-political system?

“Say no to child labour” is a catchy slogan echoing these days. Has someone thought beyond raising the slogan? What would happen to the teeming millions who get “too much to die and too little to live” through their children?

All the efforts geared to eradicate child labour are doomed to generate new social ills and add to existing ones if they lack well-integrated solid commitment, foresightedness and vision. Just imagine what would happen if a “ban” is imposed on their legitimate labour? Where would they go? Would they be able to go the school which could turn them into potential civil servants, doctors, etc.? And where can they relish the rights framed by the UN? Or should they go in search of any job anywhere on this not so gentle earth to feed their families? As a result they may become sex workers; they may become criminals; they may start catering to the drug dealers and abusers, the list is never ending. Their vulnerable family members may meet the same fate. Who is going to be blamed for this? We could curse only our

short-sightedness or our gullibility in the face of foreign pressure.

One, by no means, is in favour of the bounded labour done by children. One is also fully aware of the occupational hazards and psychosomatic disorders associated with such situations. My expectation from those who stroll in the corridors of power, politics and policy –making is that they would adopt a humanistic and holistic approach towards the problem. Treat the patient and not disease only. They should take into consideration all possible determinants of a particular problem while suggesting solutions. Raising a hue and cry against child work alias child labour and threatening poor parents/guardians with possible punishment if they do not send their children to schools sounds progressive but not owning the situation and then coming up with our own solutions.

Rampant child labour is one of the stigmas attached to Pakistan. I do not wish to impress or depress anyone with law positions registered by our community on a various situation analyses. However, I do want to bring on record that our country has been treated like a guinea pig by everybody, including ourselves. We have been depending on the outsiders to discover our problems and their solutions. We have never been able to identify and prioritise the main issues and problems. Every now and then, some big donor agencies and some influential luminaries from abroad have to descend on our homeland to convince us that henceforth our problem is environment degradation; now it is the increase in population growth rate; now, the human rights

violations, etc. But we have never been able to admit openly that we are a society of hypocrites. We have different modes of action and sets of rules for the masses and classes in all spheres of social development; be it education or health or economic and political participation in governance. Worsening the matter is the fact that we are able to use (abuse) religion as a justification to many of our misdeeds and irrational behaviour. Islam enjoins equality of opportunities. Where is that in our policy or practice? In reality, ours is a society where some people are more equal than others.

The vast majority of the less equal belong to low socio-economic strata and include women and children. The need of the time is to offer an enabling environment for education and economic opportunities for the disadvantaged communities. We as a nation have to develop the art and science of looking into the issues through our own lens rather than accepting the visions created elsewhere. It is more applicable to a complex problem like child labour than anything else.

**Published in The News, (The News On Sunday) Political Economy, February 18, 2001**

## **Born and Bred in Islamabad: City Looks Stranger Today**

“This is Islamabad”, my ‘*Ammi*’ recollected my ‘*Abbu*’ telling her while showing the black & white snap of some beautiful trees published in an old issue of ‘Mah -e- Nau’ (a literary Urdu periodical), with the caption – our new capital, “and maybe we have to move there as living situation is becoming risky here in Dhaka.”

I landed in Islamabad as a two- year-old in 1970. Ramna 6/3, harbours my childhood and early teenage memories.

The earliest image of Islamabad comes to my mind as an exceptionally clean city surrounded by mountains which looked so close that I used to start walking towards them in a hope that I would touch them very soon.

My earliest school was Islamabad College of boys (in Sector G- 6/3 near covered Market), where I studied from nursery till grade 5. Afterwards like all other girls in my class, we were taken to Islamabad College for Girls in Sector F-6/2. ICB and ICG were then considered the best educational institutions. These were then disciplined by principals like Mr. Baig, Madam Shuja Qazi, Madam Hayat and Madam Peerzada. My heart aches to believe that the latter two are no more, while I do not know about the former ones. I can still recall the “Pleasant surprise” experienced by our class-fellows when we were promoted to grade 5 without going through the final examinations. It was a later discovery that

the decision was taken in the background of waning government of Z A Bhutto.

I remember Islamabad as a city giving space to Afghan refugees and seeing more and more of them with each passing day.

I remember Islamabad as a shelter to Punjabi businessmen and professionals fleeing from volatile Karachi and interior Sindh in mid 80s.

I remember Islamabad as a child entering into her teenage with the articulation of politically incorrect questions like, why music classes are being replaced by Arabic? (Yes, we used to have music as one of the compulsory subjects. I remembered *Madam Sadiq*- a petite, cute and very strict “with boys only” music teacher trained from Calcutta at ICB and legendary *Madam Aazoori* for a short while before Zia’s Islamisation at ICG. Why Ramna and Shalimar sectors smell differently? When a middle class girl like me opts to be non-conformist and choose to wear jeans as its mildest expressions; why it should raise ethical questions among self-appointed custodians of morality? And so on and so forth. Finding not satisfying answer I began to write in “The Muslim.”

My peers and I were full of vivacity and idealistic views and we grew up with the dream that we can change the world, society, systems and power structures. But our sweet Islamabad was very quiet and still then. There were empty roads with few well behaved cars and very rare smart black cars riding rashly with some of the unmatched good looking boys and girls (sorry young lot, I have failed to see that combination of being crazy and yet classic today).

I remember a relatively crowded *Aabpara* where bargaining was considered permissible and where foreigners were blatantly told higher prices by the fruit and vegetable vendors and a quiet rather haunted Super Market which was too high and too aristocratic (next to *Kohsar*, off course) for officers below grade 20. I also remember an expanding Jinnah Super Market and how was it evaluated by the then teenagers. I can pick out that some of the present day's leading development professionals have their initial most though unofficial lessons on technical issues like head scouting, human resource management, marketing and effective presentation from our good old Jinnah Super Market.

I remember Islamabad of 1985, the year of youth, the celebrations and controversies.

I remember a safe and sophisticated Islamabad. I can vividly see myself going to British Council library and Nafdec with my siblings to watch movies.

I also recall a noisy and screaming Islamabad on April 10, 1988, when Ojhri Camp tragedy occurred. As a medical student, that 10<sup>th</sup> April of 1988 made me experienced and witnessed the painful sight, sound and silence of death.

Life is strange. Islamabad looks even stranger today. Like all ether realities, it has changed and is changing for good and for bad. Yet, there are a few things that have not changed. The "grade consciousness" of the city which is even observed in the graveyard (the beautiful and historic graveyard is itself a subject to write upon) and the iciness of "born and bred Isloo" salespersons and vendors and an inbuilt sense of pride of unknown

among the residents (though it suddenly came to the lowest ebb with the fall of Margalla Towers on 8th October 2005)

I have seen Islamabad from different angles and have been with it in its various phases. Islamabad has given me joy at the saddest and energy to revive at the weakest moments of my life. I owe so much to this beautiful city. As I am growing old in Islamabad, I feel that privately I am becoming very possessive about it. Although I like cultural diversity somehow I cannot stand 'Lahorisation' of Islamabad.

**Published in The News, May 31, 2006**

# Media Matters!

***“What is this fuss? It’s only television. Who cares? The answer is simple: everybody. There is no such thing as just a TV show”  
Stanely.***

**A** quarter of the world consists of young people between the ages of 10-14 years. Of these 86 per cent, live in the developing countries. Pakistan currently has the largest cohort of the young people in its history (25 million aged 15-24) and subsequent cohorts are projected to be even larger.

Young people face a number of critical life decisions between the ages of 15-24 that relate to a series of transitions to adulthood. A recently published national representative survey on adolescents and youth in Pakistan has unveiled many unexplored dimensions of their lives. Briefly speaking, most of them the issues related to young people are gender issues.

Gender is a social construction whereas sex is a biological accident. Accidents happen but constructions are planned. Amidst many gender issues gender based violence is a globally accepted issue. The human, social, economic and political costs of gender based violence are incalculable.

Gender based violence is not only a global but a South Asian concern too which has one of the highest incidence of gender based violence in the world.

Pakistan, the land of the pure, is no exception. Like elsewhere, women and other disadvantaged segments in Pakistan are a subject of violence of all forms. Pakistan is characterized by regrettably low scores of development indicators, constant political instability, cultural heritage and traditions reflecting centuries old patriarchy and selective male friendly application.

Pakistan is a signatory to the International Conference on Population and Development ICPD, Beijing platform of action and convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW). In terms of implementation, the ideals of all such treaties are yet to be realized to cast an impact.

Empowerment, access to equal rights and emancipation are yet only distant dreams for a vast majority of Pakistanis. However, there are now a number of efforts underway in Pakistan to promote the empowerment of women. Although there is escalating attention by the Pakistan government to gender issues including violence, and there is some movement in this direction, but there is no probable heedful and steadfast attempt geared to the understanding of the relevance of youth and gender based violence. This is valid for all service delivery, advocacy research and communication intervention.

Gender based violence is a very complex issue. There is none and there cannot be any instant recipe to solve this issue. However, according to the centre for communication programmes at John Hopkins University, US, various research studies have shown that ending violence requires strategic coordination among

many sectors of society, and also at community and nation levels. An agenda of change must include empowering women and girls raising the stakes for abusers, providing for the victims, coordinating institutional and individual responses involving youth, reaching out the men and changing community norms. This cannot be done without creative communication.

People communicate even without any modern communication media, exchange ideas and alter their behaviour. But the astonishing growth of the mass media- first print, then radio and now television and computer communication- has raised new possibilities for rapid global communication and thus the new theories about how people may react and change as a result of mass media.

In the platform for action Beijing 1995, the media were identified as one of the twelve critical areas of concern in which priority action was needed for the advancement and empowerment of women.

The media, advertising and entertainment industries, collectively known as mass media, are powerful because they penetrate every segment of modern day society and effectively influence how consumer view themselves, their neighbours, communities and the world. Although the mass media denotes outlets beyond newspapers, radio, and television and the scope of the media influence now extends to digital spectrum, cable and satellite technology and the internet, it remains a fact that the TV is the single major and foremost communicator of our times.

Television has changed the way teachers teach, government governs, religious leaders preach and even the demeanour of madness and love. It has the capacity of saying the unsaid even in a selectively traditional society like Pakistan.

Entertainment has been used for educational purpose since the beginning of human history. Greek tragedies, parables in the holy books, songs and stories in every religion and culture present the conflicts and values of different societies in vivid, dramatic and above all, entertaining terms. Modern mass media carries on this tradition, reaching millions with popular radio and TV shows that entertains and educate simultaneously.

In much of South Asia, TV is the most accessible media form. In Pakistan, the coverage of TV is between 87-90 pc. The average Pakistani youth is the most enthusiastic consumer of entertaining TV programmes, not the state controlled Pakistani TV channels. Besides, TV has become the main target for pressure groups and NGOs concerned with human rights in the media.

Nowadays, the media has emerged as the essential player in granting priority to the issue of any origin. The ruling elite of Pakistan like elsewhere are also aware that information is power. Therefore, their prime objective is to keep the illiterate, unemployed and malnourished youth powerless through controlling the state media as well. Their general attitude towards the media is obviously dictating and opposing. The net impact of this desire to control the right to information is that educated individuals are not

instructed with development issues and contemporary debates.

Although with new technologies, satellite influx and private sector media, the magnitude of this control has decreased, the general situation in connection with youth programs on TV is abysmal. Irrespective of all the odds, more and more civic actors are concentrating on advocacy through media. Where a lot of thinking and efforts are noticeable on gender and gender sensitive portrayal of women in the mainstream media of south Asia including Pakistan, it seems that the status of the youth has been ignored. This ignorance becomes even more obvious when one explores the degree of attention given to an issue like violence in the context of gender and youth by the media, including television, it is needless to point out how predominant the theme of violence is on TV and films and how propitiously the media is selling violence to youth.

Pakistan like all other developing countries entrapped in debt, dictatorship and democracy crises, has no dearth of problems. Our country is characterized by patriarchy and its implications. Illiteracy of the teeming millions just accelerates the vicious cycle of problems. In the current situation, our country not only needs political stability, gender responsive governance and strong economic growth, but a socially responsible media equipped with the ability to meet the challenges of our new world.

Global experiences have validated that preventing problems during adolescence is more practical, resource efficient and cost-effective rather than addressing problems once they occur.

Programmes/projects that work with adolescents and young people benefit everyone.

It is the time to invest in young people and in their future. And it is the time to live up to the commitments to young people the countries of the world have repeatedly made in international agreements.

Commutation programmes play an essential role in educating understanding informing and motivating young people. Since young people are the passionate consumers of popular culture and entertainment, therefore entertainment through TV is an ideal channel to reach the youth.

Regrettably, television in Pakistan has failed to provide the brand of entertainment that would address the contemporary needs of Pakistani youth. With the dawn of new channels in the private sector and a softened censor policy even for the state-owned and controlled PTV as compared to Ziaul Haq's regime, one finds breathtaking visual communication but the commitment of all TV channels towards youth and sensitive gender issues is questionable. What Pakistani TV is communicating today can be summed up as mindless adoption and confused interpretations of globalization. As a result, young people are highly informed about fashion models, silver screen which seldom have any relevance and usefulness in their practical lives. What is remarkably missing from our TV screens is the common youth, the rural youth the uneducated youth – do I need to recall the 40 percent of our 144 million live below the poverty line drawn by the World Bank and 70 percent is the rural population. If there is any representation of this

kind of youth or people in general on TV, it is done in decidedly tedious techniques.

Looking beyond the intricate details and long winded politics of the electronic media productions, in my view what really matters is to deliberately prioritize youth needs and interests. Television in this regard, can and does play a vital role in making a difference through well-researched, gripping, participatory and realistic productions that articulate youth concerns and needs, it's about time that the decision-makers seriously review collective responsibilities. A TV channel dedicated to the youth of the country may be an attractive and profitable venture for a private enterprise. It is time to take up this challenge.

**Published In The Daily Dawn, 14 December, 2003**

## **Blog**

# **The Role of Men in Contraception**

A constitutionally Islamic country riddled with contrasts, far away from the welfare model, perpetually confused on nearly all critical issues ranging from foreign policy to population planning, infamous for low status of women and girls and their social exclusion, and characterised by the dramatic capture of power elites in politics and development fields both, one wonders — what does the male role or involvement in family planning mean to Pakistan?

I tried to come up with a plausible definition of male involvement in family planning in 1999 after noticing its absence in the literature. It reads:

Male involvement in Family Planning (FP) includes, an interest of men in FP issues (indicated by their knowledge about it), a positive attitude towards it (indicated by their acceptance or approval), willingness to share responsibility for it (indicated by their actual adoption) and a willingness to share the power of decision making (indicated by them being prepared to discuss it with their spouses).

Contrary to the popular assumption, men are interested in matters of contraception. Worldwide scientific research has demonstrated that the following four reasons are most often given for involving men in reproductive health including FP:

1) Expanding the range of contraceptive options.

2) Supporting women's contraceptive use.

3) Preventing the spread of sexually transmitted infections.

4) Use the forum of reproductive health programmes to promote gender equality and the transformation of men's and women's social roles.

One can argue with the effectiveness and/or legitimacy of the reasons as a justification for including men, but it remains a fact that the implications of male involvement are broader than are often noted.

In developed countries, the efforts to involve men began as early as the late 1970s, with attempts to make women-oriented family planning clinics more inviting to men.

In developing countries, the tendency has been to exclude men from reproductive health especially FP work, other than vasectomy or condom distribution. Ironically, condoms are mostly distributed to women in South Asia rather than to men who still find it the hard to shop for them.

Pakistan, which is a signatory to nearly 12,000 international conventions and treaties, is also officially fully committed to the landmark International Conference on Population and Development's (ICPD) Goals and Targets 1994, that called for an understanding of men's and women's joint responsibilities, so that they could become equal partners in public and private life, and to encourage and enable men to take responsibility for their sexual and reproductive behaviour.

## **Health stays in the red**

Pakistan's Maternal and Child Health indicators remain extremely poor as 25,000 to 30,000 women die from complications of pregnancy and child birth every year. Millions more suffer ill health and disability. One million children die before the age of five while 16,000 die in the first month after birth.

The health policy of 2009 by the Ministry of Health has clearly acknowledged that, in spite of some improvement since 1990, the health of the people of Pakistan lags far behind the rest of South Asia and the improvements have not kept up with the increasing GDP.

The magnitude of fissures in our social development sectors makes Pakistan a model case for economic growth without development, with an under-performing health care delivery system too. Further, the socio-cultural determinants of health, such as illiteracy, unemployment, gender inequality, social exclusion, food insecurity, rapid urbanisation, environmental degradation, natural disasters and lack of access to safe water and sanitation, aggravate Pakistan's poor health status.

Though these problems are recognised by the public officials in health and population sectors, they are yet to be addressed through realistic budgetary allocations and people-centred policies.

The performance indicators of the population programme, especially those in terms of strengthening family planning programmes to

achieve its coverage and effectiveness and others relating to changing approach to delivering family planning services and improving the overall status of women and girls (irrespective of the lack of sharp focus on this particular dimension and adhocisms of such projects ) are dismal.

### **Increasing male involvement**

Since ICPD 1994 till date, a number of public, private and voluntary sector initiatives have addressed the issue of male involvement in family planning and reproductive health in Pakistan, the sixth most populous country, and that too within the patriarchal society and bureaucratic apparatus that undoubtedly fosters gender biases at institutional level and consciously or unconsciously adheres to the theory and practice of social closures.

Despite all odds and losses, the only option is to move forward and that can be effectively achieved only by engaging men (who, whether feminists like it or not, are decision makers both at the household and policy levels) in such a way as to create new heights of empowerment for women rather than dependencies. There are no short cuts or magical recipes.

However, one starting point could be to popularise common knowledge or simple scientific doctrines that would ultimately lead to a transformation in the concept of hegemonic masculinity.

If this begins to happen, our young women will not suffer because of the demand of sons, and may be many mothers in Pakistan would no more

be punished physically and emotionally or both against the “crime” of giving birth to daughters.

*A civic entrepreneur and a non-elite gender activist.*

**Published in The Daily Express Tribune, May 28, 2011**



# **G for Gender!**



# **Human Rights, Abortion and Disabled Women—A Snapshot from Pakistan**

The word 'rights' very often seem so wrong—politically, socially and technically—in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, at all levels of policy making and community gate keeping. When used in the context of Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) in general and abortion in particular, the word is even seen as threatening, no less than an explosive that will tarnish or destroy Islam, the country's dominant religion and its traditional/cultural values. The dishonour, disgrace and discrimination entrenched in the words 'abortion' and 'abortion rights' are in fact, to varying degrees and dimensions, global.

It is unfortunate, but perhaps not surprising, that there is no importance given to the element of reproductive health rights of disabled women and girls in Pakistan, whether in terms of research, advocacy, public policy planning, legislation, social awareness or health interventions. In 1990, the Pakistan government revised the colonial British Raj Penal Code of 1860 with respect to abortion. Under the 1990 revision, the conditions for abortion depend on the developmental stage of the fetus; whether the fetal organs are formed or not. Section 338 of the Pakistan Penal code states that "Whoever causes a woman with child whose organs have not been formed, to miscarry, if such miscarriage is not caused in good faith for the purpose of saving the

life of the woman or providing necessary treatment to her, is said to cause '*Isqat-i-Haml*' (isqat=abort haml=pregnancy)". Such a person is liable to a punishment of three years imprisonment if the abortion is performed by the woman's consent, otherwise, a maximum of ten years.

Section 338 B and C of the Pakistan Penal Code provides that termination of a child whose limbs have been formed for any reason other than to save the life of the mother shall be liable to pay *Diyat* (blood money), and such a person is also liable for a maximum of seven years imprisonment.

The law does not allow abortion on the basis of fatal defects. Whoever causes *Isqat-i-Janin* shall be liable to half of the *Diyat* if the child is born dead. Full *Diyat* is liable if the child is born alive but dies as a result of any act of the offender. And imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to seven years as *Ta'zir* (in Islamic Law, *Ta'zir* refers to punishment, usually corporal, that can be administered at the discretion of the judge). If there is more than one child in the womb of the woman, the offender shall be liable to separate *Diyat* or *Ta'zir* for each child. If as a result of *Isqat-i-Janin*, any injury is caused to the woman or she dies, the offender shall also be liable to punishment for such injury or death.

Distinguished Pakistani lawyer, late Ms. Rashida Patel recorded in her book *Woman vs. man: Socio-legal gender equality in Pakistan* (Oxford University Press, 2003) that this explanation of penalty became a law in 1996 through a

Presidential ordinance. Until 1997, abortion was permitted to save the life of the mother but then the law was amended in the light of injunctions of the Quran and Sunnah. At that point, abortion also became legal in cases where it was necessary to provide treatment to the mother.

It is pertinent to ask here, who benefits from an exception to the rule, and, who establishes the exception to the rule? The global trend of a higher number of back street or unsafe abortions, and a smaller number of "therapeutic/necessary treatment" abortions by expensive consultants is common in Pakistan as well. As always, those who need safe abortions the most, remain mostly deprived of them. During my active clinical life, I found several woman doctors, nurses and health workers, trained and untrained, conducting all forms of abortion. As a physician mistaken for a gynaecologist (woman doctors are commonly mistaken for either nurses or gynaecologists/obstetricians in my country) I used to get many requests for a 'DNC' by husbands (the dilation of the cervix and surgical removal of part of the lining of the uterus and/or contents of the uterus by scraping and scooping) for their wives. These men were of the view that family planning—through the use of condoms, birth control and so forth—are not allowed under Islam and Christianity. This experience also made me understand that a woman's body is under the ownership of her husband or male partner. This says a lot about the autonomy of women.

Religion and culture are unashamedly twisted to further disadvantage and endorse the subordinate positions of Pakistani women and

girls from all classes and faiths. Available research is almost silent on the predicament of non-Muslim Pakistani women and girls regarding their sexual and reproductive rights.

Pakistan, being the world's sixth most populous country, having an estimated 37.9 million women in the reproductive age group (15-49 years) with an estimated 4.2 million births occurring annually, faces enormous population and development related challenges. Nine percent of Pakistan's teenage girls have already begun childbearing (the highest percentage in Sindh province (11 percent) and the lowest in Balochistan province (seven percent)) and the overall adolescent birth rate is seven percent.

Pakistan's annual abortion rate is about 29 per 1,000 women aged 15-49 years. If this persists, every Pakistani woman will experience an abortion in her lifetime. During 2002, 890, 000 induced abortions were performed. Nationally, about one in seven pregnancies is terminated by abortion. Associated mortality and morbidity rates are high—23 percent of all Pakistani women who get an abortion are hospitalized for treatment of complications, and some 197, 000 women are treated annually for abortion related complications.

According to Dr. Zeba Sathar, Country Director of Pakistan's Population Council, "What is strikingly clear from these estimates is that induced abortion is a widely used method of preventing unwanted births in Pakistan."

None of this and other related information profiles women and girls in connection with their disability status. According to research by the

Population Council, the most documented reasons for abortions are: poverty, fetus abnormality, 5 percent medical reasons, desire of a smaller family, 65 percent after determining the sex, pre and extra marital affairs, contraceptive failures.

I recall my days as the first Field Medical Trainer for the pilot project of contraceptives' social marketing by Population Services International DC-Us, through which I became aware of many such cases. What was tough to me at a personal level was the inability of health service providers to suggest any remedy besides her boring unpredictable degree of bias and judgment. The technical and professional failing of doctors and paramedics to identify and address the health and sexual and reproductive needs of the disabled in general, and women and girls in particular, is yet to be seen as a serious threat to the quality of medical teaching and health service provided by the concerned authorities within a government that spends two percent or a little more of its GDP on health and education.

A study entitled 'Perceptions, interpretations and implications of abortions: A qualitative enquiry among the legal community of Pakistan' conducted by the Marie Stopes Society, Pakistan in 2011 concluded that:

To facilitate access of women to abortion and related care, the knowledge of the existing law among legal professionals must improve. The implications of abortion for maternal health and its repercussions on a community governed by the Islamic dogmas must be publicized. The legal community could have an instrumental role in

bringing about attitudinal changes *vis-à-vis* abortions in the society.

Chairperson of the National Commission on the Status of Women and renowned activist Ms. Khawar Mumtaz observed that, "The law does not make a distinction between mentally challenged or sound women. There is no policy that I know of; but doctors may have developed some kind of unwritten code." The view of researcher and public health specialist Dr. Syed Zakir Hussain, however, is that since Pakistan's current abortion law permits abortions to save the life of the mother and/or to provide necessary treatment for physical, mental or social conditions, "in this way there is provision for mentally retarded women as the continued pregnancy would affect her mentally". He admits though, that there is no "data or system to collect the number of disabled women receiving post abortion care services."

An important determinant of health is education. The privileged few who happen to go to school here (Pakistan has the second highest rate of out of school children in the world, and 65 percent of its population is under 30 years) do not learn anything about general or adolescents SRHR. Some donor funded projects focusing on youth SRHR and women's rights advocacy have created some ripples, but these are limited to a very few elite institutions.

Generally speaking, there is a complete lack of attention to the issue of abortion and disabled women. Furthermore, the few short term project based approaches to address general abortion do not take local cultural factors and needs into account, and have thus failed to produce any

meaningful or significant change in education or legislation. An evident social dismissal of the issue of abortion is an understandable impact indicator of the failure of such half-baked actions.

Various research reports, studies and articles were unable to provide any substance or statistics about disabled women and girls who are victims of rape, gang rape and or incest leading to pregnancy. How many such victims can access abortion care at all, let alone the abortion? There is no information available about the mentally retarded women and girls who are repeatedly raped and become pregnant multiple times.

According to Ms. Abia Akram, a young Pakistani leader of women with disabilities:

The exact data or any evidence based research is not available. Since I am working with women with diverse disabilities from different geographic areas, I have heard about cases where women with intellectual disability got pregnant and their parents took them for abortion, especially in the flood affected areas. These cases are never reported, since they don't want to disclose the disability and secondly they don't have access to justice.

Barring aside the justified need of accessing a safe abortion without being judged by married and unmarried women who may be victims of rape, incest and unprotected sex in different situations, the predicament of disabled women and girls who conceive either under compulsion or by choice but want to abort the fetus are yet to be identified as an issue in mainstream activism, academia and advocacy on SRHR related issues. This differs from most developed societies, where

the issue is mainly about the rights of disabled women/girls to be able to continue with the pregnancy and/or being able to abort the fetus if any congenital anomaly is detected during antenatal care.

The stifling and non-intellectual Islamization induced in the late 1970s by General Zia's military dictatorship peaked in the last decade, resulting in the reluctance of intellectuals, writers and legislators to bring forth any alternative positions or initiate a liberal dialogue on tricky issues like abortion, control of women's bodies and so on. These subjects remain confined to a very limited group of activists (in no way united), who are very often accused of performing western donors' driven activism.

Disability cannot be cherished anywhere in the world, but being disabled in Pakistan for women and girls is the worst disadvantage a human being could experience. It is unfortunate that Pakistan has a significant percentage of physically and/or mentally challenged women. These women largely get pregnant as a result of sexual violence, and there is no safe way for them to terminate their pregnancies.

I look forward to the day when pro-people governance policies will be designed, when even marginalized groups would be included in the discourses on gender and SRHR and all individuals including disabled women and girls, can dream and decide about their lives with dignity, respect and complete protection from the State, if not society. I dare to suggest that as a step towards this ideal, it is time to revisit the

Hippocratic Oath traditionally taken by physicians written ca. 400 B.C:

I will give no deadly medicine to any one if asked, nor suggest any such counsel; and in like manner I will not give to a woman a peccary to produce abortion. With purity and with holiness, I will pass my life and practice my Art. While I continue to keep this Oath un-violated, may it be granted to me to enjoy life and the practice of the art, respected by all men, in all times! But should I trespass and violate this Oath, may the reverse be my lot!

*Dr.Rakhshinda Perveen is a recognized public health and gender expert and activist based in Pakistan. She can be reached at [dr.r.perveen@gmail.com](mailto:dr.r.perveen@gmail.com)*

**Published in 'Ethics in Action', 05 October 2014.**

Source:

<http://www.ethicsinaction.asia/archive/2014-ethics-in-action/2014V8N5/2014V8N5P08>

# **My Post-Feminist view on the Representation of Women in Media**

*By a Social Entrepreneur, Gender and Public Health Specialist, and award-winning producer for series “Gender Watch” on PTV in 2001.*

At professional forums, I introduce myself as a non-firebrand activist who is not anti-men. I have researched and written about the male role in women’s lives, especially reproductive health issues and I produced the first-ever television show on male gender issues. Despite my emerging scholarship on masculinity, I remain a voice for the diversity and dynamism that women represent.

In all my work – before and behind the camera, writing for newspapers, producing theatre, and engaging on social media I have learned that in my very interesting and resilient country, the influx of media outlets is the best thing that has happened so far. There are no short cuts to empowering women but the media is definitely one of the shortest and sturdiest routes. In Pakistan’s current media landscape, women from diverse backgrounds are creating waves. While there are discriminatory practices within media against women – particularly young women who are more vulnerable to exploitation – women are occupying this space with speed.

Nevertheless, little attention, if any, is being paid to the image standards imposed on women in leadership roles in the media. For instance, an ageing man is seen as highly intellectual, seasoned and capable to host a current show especially on current affairs but the same is not true for women. I have noted with great concern and displeasure, that even the very few leading women hosts/anchors put on gaudy outward and makeup when they are interviewing or doing an exclusive show with a VIP in Pakistan.

Global research on women in media has established that women and girls are more excluded, they are silenced or speak less, and when women are characterized in roles, they are often hyper sexualized. Women's Media Centre, a U.S. based organization, tracks to what extent the American media allows women to craft their own narrative in public discourse in print and online. Their 2014 report ascertained that the media is both overwhelmingly male and still, alas, overwhelmingly white. This truth is disappointing and unfortunate for all of us, particularly in Pakistan. While there are small independent studies taking place – put forward by women's rights advocacy non-profits – that correspond with these findings, there has neither been a candid conversation nor any national-level research regarding issues such as class, race, ethnicity, religion, or sex disparities in media.

Despite all this, more and young women opt for media related jobs and struggle uncompromisingly to construct bridges within

institutional, cultural and functional barriers – often with patriarchy as the common foundation.

**Published in a Media special issue of ‘Khabro Nazar’  
(bi-lingual newsletter of the US Embassy in Pakistan).  
March, 2015**

# **Legalising Prostitution — the Wisdom of the UN?**

According to a research, modern day trafficking, aka slavery is a \$32 billion annual industry and according to the U.N. about 2.5 million people around the world are ensnared in the web of human trafficking at any given time. The usual victims of atrocious crimes of sexual and gender based violence, including rape against women and girls (young, adolescents and teen) are poor, uneducated, rural and trafficked ones.

Men and boys are also trafficked but they are mostly used as camel jockeys (particularly young and thin ones) and for hard labour. Though slavery seems history, it still exists and not all slaves are trafficked but those who are trafficked are undeniably slaves and for women, young and minor girls, it is sex slavery.

This one of the top most lucrative and visibly invisible form of illegal slavery within national or across international borders is for the intent of imposed sex work that in turn includes bare essentials like commercial pornography, physical abuse and prostitution. Each year, an estimated 800,000 women and children are trafficked across international borders—though additional numbers of women and girls are trafficked within countries.

The Department of State, in its report last year, stated that 29 countries, including the US, the UK, Germany, Australia, New Zealand, Austria, Taiwan, were listed as Tier 1 countries

whose governments fully comply with Trafficking Victims Protection Act -TVPA's minimum standards. The office included 21 countries as Tier 3, which included Iran, Zimbabwe, Yemen, Zambia, Uzbekistan, Syria, Russia, Saudi Arabia, North Korea, whose governments do not fully comply with the minimum standards.

Most of South Asian states are source, transit and destination regions for persons subjected to forced labour and sex trafficking. This does not take into account Bangladesh, Bhutan and Sri Lanka that are source and modern anti-trafficking laws and structures in South Asia are redundant and are merely theoretical instruments that in most scenarios remain either biased or undue. According to a news report published in the Express Tribune (Pakistan) on 24 February 2014, the country may join the group of some 44 countries already on the 'Tier 2 Watch List' as human trafficking is rising in the country at an alarming level – the number of most-wanted human traffickers in the country has jumped from 89 to 141 in the last four years.

According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the greatest numbers of traffickers are from Asia, followed by Central and South-eastern Europe, and Western Europe. Crime groups involved in the sex trafficking of women and girls are also often involved in the transnational trafficking of drugs and firearms, and frequently use violence as a means of carrying out their activities. Thailand, China, Nigeria, Albania, Bulgaria, Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine are among the countries that are the greatest sources of trafficked persons. The

UNODC cites Thailand, Japan, Israel, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Italy and the United States as common destination countries of trafficked women and girls.

There is acclaimed evidence on the complicatedness of the trafficked sufferers who not only live through a range of phases of disgrace and physical and psychological persecution but are also often deprived of food and sleep. Mostly they are unable to move about freely, and are tormented in the flesh. In order to keep women enslaved, victims are told their families and their children will be harmed or murdered if they (the women) try to escape or tell anyone about their situation. They undergo another stratum of psychological ordeal and emptiness because they rarely understand the culture and language of the country into which they have been trafficked, “Often, before servicing clients, women are forcibly raped by the traffickers themselves, in order to initiate the cycle of abuse and degradation. Some women are drugged in order to prevent them from escaping. Once ‘broken in’, sex trafficked victims can service up to 30 men a day, and are vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases, HIV infection and unwanted pregnancy” different research reports have repeatedly authenticated it.

Though there is no direct link between the spread of HIV and sex ‘work’ but for obvious reasons prostitutes /Commercial Sex Workers (CSW)/ trafficked CSW are more vulnerable to HIV. What is the solution then? Stop Human Trafficking? Eradicate poverty? Establish gender Equality? Penalize traffickers and slavers? No.

The brilliant response is to Legalize Prostitution because Sex is a Trade, and Sex workers must not be criminalized. Yes, believe it or not right now this is the solution from none other than the UN. According to leaked material (March 2014) from a UN Women agency there are calls for prostitution to be legalised. This has outraged women who have been trafficked into prostitution and who have escaped. According to multiple web sources, there was a panel on this issue at the UN Commission on the Status of Women this week. “The survivors of sex trafficking and prostitution spoke to an overflowing crowd at the UN’s annual conference on women. The panel on “Prostitution or Sex Work,” organized by The Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW), was held as diplomats negotiated whether to describe prostitution as “sex work”. The term “sex work” originated by US-based pimps in order to normalise prostitution. While many use the term to avoid offending prostituted women, mainstreaming the phrase only benefits pimps and panderers, panellists said. Prostitution is not work, they argued – it is paid rape, and using the term hurts efforts to stop it. UN agencies recently released reports telling countries to decriminalize all aspects of prostitution to reduce HIV/AIDS and promote human rights. A UN Development Program (UNDP) report on HIV and the Law and Sex Work and the Law in Asia and the Pacific, a UNDP, UN Population Fund and UNAIDS-backed report, calls for decriminalising prostitution-reported Ms. Lisa Correnti.

I can safely claim that legalization of sex workers can make headlines in the news but does

not offer respect, self-esteem and honour to sex workers. While roaming in the Red Light District Amsterdam, I have seen through the eyes of my heart the pain and anger on the faces of those “tax paying legal sex workers” (the majority are not Dutch by the way-they are trafficked ) some of them were so young and some of them were so old. What a decay of human civilization (some self-styled liberals may see it as an epic of tolerance).

The nexus of public health issues including HIV transmission and sex trafficking need focused attention in terms of empathy, research and socially acceptable solution without eulogizing paid sex and putting more women and girls into one of the most hurtful and horrid realities known as sex slavery and trafficking.

*Ps: I want to quote Ms.Nasreen Azher, former member of the National commission on the status of Women, a renowned and highly respected woman rights activist of Pakistan who while responding to my email on this issue to some important human rights, child rights and women rights network in Pakistan wrote “I agree Rakhshinda. That the UN is even considering legalizing prostitution is outrageous. It shows how the market is ruling the world and corrupting human values and causing human suffering. The pimps, exploiters and, of course, the traffickers, as well as those who buy sexual services should be penalized. Thanks for sharing. Regards. Nasreen”*

*Author is a public health specialist, HIV & GBV Researcher and human rights activist. She has also served as gender advisor in South Asia and dealt with trafficking in women and children. She can be reached at; dr.r.perveen@gmail.com*

**An Article from the Asian Human Rights Commission,  
March 25, 2014**

## Daughters-Not Counted

I was looking for a driver. A friend sent a candidate to me. It was a man who appeared to be in his sixth decade. He was bearded (henna was too obvious) and a cap was fitted on his head. I began the interview with the easiest and may be the most irrelevant question. “*Tumharay kitnay bachay hain?*” “Four”, he replied proudly. “What are they doing?” I inquired further. He gave me their particulars (all of them had left their studies and were virtual vagabonds)” So you do not have any girl”, I commented while attempting to make my tone as complimentary as possible. “*Na Ji Na, Meiri Teen Beityan Hein* (no, no I have 3 daughters)” he corrected me quickly, adding as much despondency as possible. He appeared in nearly all Hindi/Urdu social films. “So you have 7 children” I declared to confirm. He nodded indubitably. I concluded the interview.

What should I do in the light of the above?

Select this man as my driver? (He is so gender insensitive)

Or

Send him on a gender training course?

How much time will be needed to change this man’s attitude?

How quickly will he learn to count his daughters  
as well?

Can anybody tell me?

***Published in 'AGEHI'<sup>1</sup> Issue-1, Spring, 2001***

---

<sup>1</sup> Advocates of Gender, Education & Health Information was an incubation center founded by the author. It also produced 8 quarterly newsletters between 2001-2003, managed and edited by the author. In Urdu Agehi means awareness.

---

# **Do Our Population Policy Framers Know This Woman?**

The field worker's face was glowing. "*Madam Ji, Mein Iss Ko Lei Hi Ayai Akher*", (finally I have brought her) she said in a voice overloaded with the twitter of triumph. "Shabash, now work harder for more clients and a rise. Do not miss *Mohalla* meeting today." I accredited her accomplishment. Since I was a trained Family planning practitioner, I knew tricks of management.

As she left the room I looked attentively at my client who was brought for the tubal ligation. She appeared to me a grief-stricken women around 50, but her clinical card, was telling that she was only 36.

"So Jannat Bibi, after 8 children and 4 abortions you have finally decided to stop your children", I broke the silence with not very suitable words which I instantly realized. She remained quiet but gave me a piece of paper. That was the most important piece of information that she was carrying, the consent of her husband.

"Aha so your husband has become considerate." I filled my voice with the best possible level of ebullience.

She burst into tears. "He is getting married again to have sons. I am a girl-maker; he does not want me to produce more girls for him", she said in a doddering voice. While comforting her, I abruptly started planning for attending some

more training workshops to handle such highly unexpected situations never mentioned in any of the five-star hotel-based training workshops that I had attended so far. A question arose, somewhere deep inside my heart: Do our population policy framers know this woman?

***Published in 'AGEHI' Issue-2, Autumn, 2001***

## **A Woman's Work!**

For a change, I was very happy that day and complimenting myself on meeting nearly 90% of the deadlines and targets. I reassured myself repeatedly that all this was possible because of the hard work of our organization; its efforts at mainstreaming gender issue. Finding ways of transforming change for women and creating an environment.

While trying to quantify all these actions. I was interrupted by the office boy who brought a file. Since I am almost obsessed with clearing my desk as early as possible, I decided to go through the file immediately. To my extreme surprise (read shock) with the exception of a few. It appeared that all our female employees had requested at least one-week holiday following the Eid break. The reasons given were more or less similar: they had to attend important weddings or other ceremonies in their *SUSRAL* (in-laws): missing those marriages could have an adverse effect on their own marriages. It was obvious that all the applicants were married women. That implied that only unmarried, Divorced and widowed did not ask for holidays.

My elated mood changed. I started feeling that all our gains would convert into losses at the end of the year, if I accepted their leave request, as our program would have suffered by their absence. On other hand, if I rejected their requests these women would suffer, recalling the emotional fragility of most of those women I gave up the idea of talking to them.

What is still not clear to me and I am struggling to find an answer to is, why Pakistan women do not reject a subjugated image and position for themselves? When would they be able to use their education and employment as tools for empowerment and create an environment, which addresses their rights? For how long educated women Pakistan have to hurt their careers due to family situations? For how long Pakistani husbands would tend to forget that women work in the offices in the same way as the men do, they too have to be responsible to their superiors in the office? And why working women are not considered equal partner in supporting the family instead of being treated as casual sidekicks whose jobs were not to be taken seriously, except their pay checks?

***Published in 'AGEHI' Issue-3, Winter, 2002***

## **“Suitable Sectors” for Women**

“Since we have seven girls in our Medicine unit therefore the standard of our tea club would hopefully go up.” I still remember these words our illustrious Professor on our first day of internship. I can still recall the unsaid lack of faith in our professional competency written on the faces of all the registrars and senior doctors escorting us. (Then I was totally unaware of the academic translation of that misplaced and quite a pejorative comment). In spite of feeling not so delighted on such a remark, like the other six. I too could not protest. I just noted down in my Daily orders diary and felt frightful about my cookery expertise.

Some ten years later, I faced another moment of revelation. That was from one of the senior directors of the organization that I happened to head. He asked me to give my “intellectual inputs” on the sandwiches that he was thinking of serving the forth-coming meeting of our Board. I was more interested to know the budget that was being prepared for that meeting. To my utter disbelief, the director could not hide his displeasure on the irrelevance of my unnecessary interest in the budgetary affairs. After all that was not a Woman’s cup of tea.

Although on the second occasion, I was theoretically and practically an aware and informed person regarding Gender. I admit that fact I did not raise my voice in protest, could have been censured but suddenly I realized that

activism without substance would not help women. We have to demonstrate our capabilities even in those areas considered and perceived as non-women areas.

Dear folks, here is a small inventory of all those BIG Areas/items/fields where women's entry is not recommended by a majority of men and a fair amount of women also:

- Finance/Economy/Budget  
Housing/Urban Planning
- Monitoring/Evaluation  
Trade/Industry
- Field Work  
Transport/Communication
- Sports  
Surgery
- Religion  
Leadership

When would the traditional societies change their mind-sets; I do not know. However, I certainly know that if women really want to be empowered, then they should stop expecting concessions for their femaleness and should be ready to give up the convenience of subordination.

***Published in 'AGEHI' Issue-4, Spring - Summer, 2002***

## **On Gender Equality....**

“What is your idea of Gender Equality?” A gender trainer posed a query in the brainstorming session of a gender training of the master trainers.

As expected the veteran group embellished the session with all hot-selling jargons, philosophies and conceptual frameworks. By the tea break, everyone was ostensibly happy on the participatory, gender-aware and gender-sensitive progression and pace of the training.

“You did not express your ideas”, I asked a junior French colleague. “I was not sure of my English, all of you were speaking very fast, I am slow” he said puritanically.

“We, South Asians speak fast may be to hide our language flaws, but I am really keen to hear you on gender equality”, I tried to assure him.

“Well, you know I have two bosses, a male boss and a woman boss. So far everything is ok. But I think that gender equality means that you have an equally incompetent woman-boss”, he voiced in his soft, slow and shy style.

I wonder if some of us, believing in the strength of numbers, are actually implementing this dimension of gender equality.

My question is: Is gender equality a realistic target?

***Published in ‘AGEHI’ Issue-5, Spring, 2003***

# Because I am a Girl

“Ammi I wish I was not a girl”, whispered my 6 year old daughter. “Why?” performing unruffled I managed to pose an erudite question.

“Girls can’t dance on the streets-shirtless-like Salman khan,” she vigorously answered.

“Salman khan is a film hero, he has to do such things, but my dear believe me, respectable and reasonable people including boys do no go shirtless on the streets and that too dancing,” I tried to respond to her hurriedly and credibly without bothering whether my words are judgmental or violating any feminist theory or the human right of freedom of expression.

I am not sure whether I convinced my daughter or not. However, I became more abstracted and uncomfortable with the social constructs in vogue.

I wonder if I could ask somebody that:

- Who entitled men especially Pakistani/Indian men to turn their motherlands into open toilets?
- Which brand of masculinity is promoted by publicly urinating?
- Why our desi media reports theatrically about women giving births to babies in a Rikshaw but never troubled to slam the most frequent graffiti about male sexual weakness?

***Published in ‘AGEHP’ Issue-6, Summer, 2003***

# Gender Biases in Languages

It was in all the Urdu newspapers, the leading ones and the misleading ones both have put that news item in the similar thrilling, marketable and callous context.

The news headline read as Kunwari Maan Apna Gunah Pheink Gai-roughly translated as that a virgin/unmarried mother has dumped the product of her sin.

Ever since I became able to read Urdu (and that happened at an early age of 6) I am reading such news, with growing age and understanding of the rules of business of our planet earth, I am feeling a deeper sense of pain, injustice and helplessness inside me (although the activist soul of mine is seldom willing to acknowledge that helplessness).

No, no I am not going to draw ones attention to the need of gender sensitive language in journalism. I am fully aware that many of my development colleagues are seriously embarked on this issue and many donor agencies are willingly offering their assistance in this regard.

- What I have failed to accept that why our people are conditioned to be selective when it comes to the issues of morality and human behaviour?
- Why people relish to put the burden of blame, shame, guilt, honour and sets of ethics on women only?

- Does this mean that men have no haya, Sharam, honour or self-respect?

***Published in 'AGEHI' Issue-7, Autumn, 2003***

# **Patriarchy Unlimited!**

It was another conference which I was attending. It was a big and prestigious event. The one indicator defining these two characters (big + prestigious) was the subtle but immense sense of pride among the invitees. After all anybody who was somebody qualified the unwritten and unsaid eligibility criteria and was ultimately put on the guests list. The agenda of the conference was matching with its mammoth matchlessness. It encompassed Socio-economic Development, Democracy, Governance and the latest block buster gender issues including peace.

I like all other civil society colleagues, also, experienced a unique sense of achievement and undefined but definite sense of pride. The only sense of discomfort, however, was caused by some questions that sizzled through the corridors of my restless mind. I could not answer them then. I do not have any answers even now. But then I could not voice them. Now I am sharing them with all of you.

- What is the objective of converting the converted?
- Is there unintended cultivation and promotion of Civil Elitism?
- If yes, then why and where it would lead to? If no then why some vital groups who could really make a difference are excluded from such events?
- Isn't civil elitism a sophisticated and apparently benign expression of patriarchy?

---

***Published in 'AGEHI' Issue-8, Spring - Summer, 2004***

# How to End Violence against Women and Girls?

Living and Working as a woman is not effortless and uncomplicated anywhere in the world as may be evidenced by the magnitude of the problems faced by them. These problems are guised as different forms of abuses, violence, discrimination and biases.

The experience of living and working as a Muslim woman in the patriarchal belt of South Asia that is characterized by instances of incredible gender injustices and discrimination is indeed a distinctive if not a more difficult experience.

***For the poor and powerless everything is a problem. Yet if I have to choose one issue that is not only close to my heart and head but a real concern for the country and societies in South Asia it is the Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG).***

By definition VAWG is any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats to such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life (article 1 of UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women). One out of every five women in the world is physically or sexually abused by a man at some point in her life. In the developing world one third of the women are subjected to daily domestic violence.

***Women aged 15-44 are more at risk from rape and domestic violence than from cancer, car accidents, war and malaria, according to World Bank data.***

In my over two decades of diverse but matching experiences in the social development sector of Pakistan and some countries of South Asia, I have noted that that the common denominator between women from classes and masses remains subjugation.

***A woman has to prove herself par excellence in bed room and board room.***

South Asian women and girls also experience all those shades and severity of violence and abuse that are being experienced by their counterparts from other regions and nationalities around the globe while their respective states and government machineries continue to operate with waxing and waning levels of commitment and transparency under the obligations of different international conventions and treaties to which they are signatories.

South Asian women and girls also experience certain specific forms of violence like dowry and marriage customs, marital status, caste and ethnicity based discriminations (widows, *Dalit* women etc.) that are endorsed and nurtured in the garbs of culture, religion and notions of honour.

The cycle of violence can and does occur from the very start of life (even before birth in the form of sex-selective abortion), through childhood, marriage, and into old age — all these are identified in the literature as the life cycle of violence against women.

***The critics in Pakistan when faced with the statistics and rising trends of VAWG, argue that it is a global phenomenon and why one should highlight it as it gives horrendous image to the South Asian region.***

While there are no two opinions on the global prevalence of VAWG, the patterns and forms of the abuses are complex in South Asia. Adding to the complexity is the fact that most forms of VAWG are sanctioned in the name of honour and culture by the society and laws are either absent on such issues or, even if pro-women laws are in place, is almost impossible to access justice.

It remains a fact that most of the countries in South Asia have a fragile context in terms of governance and democracies, if present, are yet to be matured and institutionalized. The patriarchal belt of South Asia is also characterized by dynastic politics, sub-regional hate politics, wars and conflicts, nepotism and lack of transparency. In this troubled background and fore-ground issues of VAWG lose their prioritisation and as a result little if any political will is seen to combat the issue.

Inadvertently, the civil society organizations including media in the private sector have emerged as a conscious and vibrant segment of these oppressed societies. Owing to their collective efforts the denial on the existence of harmful cultural practices and different forms of abuses against women and girls has ended and victims are eventually breaking the silence on the violence and evolving as survivors.

There is no instant way out. The speedy and sustainable progress towards constructing a

society that is free of VAWG, however, is possible and can be achieved by strengthening civic will, working with the legislators for progressive laws and rule of law and media for raising awareness, sensitization and voicing for accountability of the perpetrators.

***Besides these, my personal and prioritised strategy is to integrate VAWG as a public health issue and engage men because they are social gate keepers, and the issues of VAWG can never be solved without the involvement of gender responsive men.***

**Linked In: March 13, 2016**

## **My 2 Cents (Obviously Nobody Took It!)**

*I joined a political party in 2009 and was appointed as the secretary political training and member of a think tank. I used to design and deliver trainings and developed well researched and creative thought papers. I worked hard, got respect and appreciation but never allowed to go beyond a certain point. Ha !Ha !*

Apart from the official reports on economic growth and outstanding achievements of some young women in non-traditional sectors like Mountaineer Ms. Samina Baig or Fighter Pilot Ms. Ayesha Farooqi or IT wizard kid late Ms. Arfa Karim Randhawa; What is the overall predicament of that cohort of the Pakistani Women, the ordinary women, (may be with marvellous mettle) who are existing and want to claim their space without the push of the class and pull of the networking with power elites? I strongly believe that empowerment in its earnest essence is nothing but a cloud-cuckoo-land. C-suits, high public offices and corridors of parliament still have an unwritten board that says “rights of admission reserved”. With only 3 per cent of women in management positions, Pakistan occupies last place among the 108 countries where the management force is female; discloses a new study released in 2015, by the International Labour Organization (ILO).

Monetized sphere mostly dominated by men and non-monetized one characterized by women’s

labour including caring labour and that too unpaid in most of the cultures and countries constitute the economy of Pakistan as well.

There is no magical wand either for ending poverty (income and opportunities both) or gender inequality that harbours social class inequalities and impacts economy. However, globally in general, and in developed countries in particular, there is a growing empathic understanding and endorsement of the fact and truth that women and girls are, can and should be the drivers of the sustainable economic growth.

In the current political landscape of my country Pakistan, economy is the key battle field that is influencing political parties' popularity, homeland's security and mental state of the masses to name a few.

My two cents for the political leaders is to wake up and become cognizant of a changing world.

The struggle against poverty, social exclusion, discrimination and injustices is in progress. However, it is largely donor agencies driven and short term besides lacking technical skills, power of passion and speed. NGOs mushrooming and NGOs bashing further taint efforts. The politicians with popular votes and constituencies have to be proactive and lead with full sensibility, sincerity and responsibility. An urgent and adequate action oriented policy response to inequalities between women and men is needed in Pakistan. The time to empower Pakistani disadvantaged women economically that would eventually lead to socio-political empowerment,

has arrived. Practically believing in gender equality by investing in and for women , instituting pro-women legislation, ensuring unbiased and non-judgmental implementation, dispelling myths about confident women, ending institutional patriarchy are not only at the heart of the smart economics but weave the soul of the smart politics too.

# Surviving as a Woman Consultant!

*Surviving as a passionate, sensitive, honest and intelligent woman consultant in the patriarchal space -5 tips for surviving unscratched and emerging as a success story*

*NB1: Feminist Men Can Also Relate to this account*

*NB2: The author failed to follow all these tips*

I have always experienced learning, unlearning, interesting interactions and above all freedom the kind of freedom employees in a 9-5 set up never have in the amazing space of Consulting.

However, myself being a self-made and thinking woman who is not willing to seek the concessions of being a female has exposed me to the Dark Sides of Consulting as well, that I would like to share with all those women and men consultants who are striving to earn their livelihoods in countries characterized by the absence of merit and dominance of nepotism, corruption and culture of deception by working as the free-lance consultants.

You ought to have plenty of intelligence to waste, to deal with mediocrity.

1. Never show your intellectual glow to the hiring agency-your shine may damage their eyes and mood.
2. Learn the arts or skills of apple polishing and flexibility (join yoga classes for preparing your mind and body) some translate these

arts/skills as practical wisdom. The choice is yours.

3. Remember that the *Tasks* given in contract you signed may not necessarily be the ones for which your presence and technical inputs would be actually used by the hiring agency. Prepare yourself for some complimentary snubs.
4. Do not forget not to cherish a single moment of the dark sides of a consulting assignment, keep reminding yourself that this is an unfair world and your job is to remain as fair as possible according to your pain threshold and the capacity of your immune system.

**Linked In: November 18, 2014**

# **Thriving without God Father's Leadership: As I Know It! A Non Elite Perspective from Pakistan.**

*The three key styles of leadership (Authoritarian or autocratic, Participative or democratic and Delegative or Free Reign) as identified by the psychologist Kurt Lewin in 1939 should be at hand in a good leader in right proportions. (Unfortunately Google does not give precision of the right proportion):).*

*Whenever I give myself a prospect to evaluate (through monologue, face to face conversation with a mentor , internet quizzes, etc.) my own style of leadership I have found it to be predominantly participative with need based stroke of autocracy and delegative to avoid issues of gender in a given cultural context.*

*At the start of my career I used to get frustrated by the rigidity of the bureaucratic apparatus and conservative if not bigoted mindsets of the decision makers in public and citizens' sector. Later at the start of the non-profit that I conceptualized at the age of 27 years had senior professionals as the member board of directors, mostly men with a clout. At that point I recognized four biases ; age bias ( I was young), class bias ( I belong to a middle class educated family), gender bias ( I am woman and a divorced mother ) and ethnicity bias( I come from a family that faced two migrations) that can work against me and become an absolute barrier.*

Quite soon I made a choice and I believe the right one. Instead of “wasting my energy” on improving the processes and systems, I channelized my intellectual strengths towards mentoring and working directly with the disadvantaged communities with participatory tools. To convert barriers into bridges I made certain transformations.

At the personal level I gave up painting my face (as a TV anchor I became used to pan-caked appearance) and, at the professional front, I heavily concentrated on developing advocacy and coalition skills while raising self-tolerance for negative criticism and organizational politics. I do not claim that visible concrete bridges came into being but even if they were hanging ones, the outcomes remained in the interest of the organization that eventually emerged as a success story. People Management and leadership got incorporated in my professional life as a medical student. My voluntary work with different NGOs, educational institutions and remunerated assignments assisted me in exploring different dimensions of staff development. However, SACHET provided me the biggest opportunity to develop and demonstrate people management

*In my opinion, an effective manager is one who is feared not hated and an effective leader is the one who provides enabling milieu for the next generation of leadership.*

Regarding people management I ensured at the onset of SACHET that the organization would select people on the basis of merit and not consider any domicile, quota system. However,

positive discrimination /affirmative action would be observed with special groups like physically challenged people and people who have faced poverty of opportunities, the organization would invest in people in spite of the risk of losing well-trained people to bigger organizations. Further this investment would not be limited to a certain cadre of staff members but would be equitable and the office hierarchy would virtually exist for the maintenance of discipline only.

As a team leader, I have always underscored the ethical fibre and ensured policy and practices that would cultivate friendship at personal level, capacity-building at professional level and competition, rather than rivalry at the organizational level. I developed performance standards and tools for performance appraisal for my staff members working at different levels and in different thematic areas like health, education, training, poverty, livelihoods, gender etc.

*My personal favourites in terms of outcomes of my leadership and management abilities are three successes that include :materialization of the communication model that I presented in my MPH thesis (Men: Partners Not Masters, towards gender equity in Family Planning in Pakistan) into a popular TV magazine show series, inclusion of code of conduct regarding gender harassment, child protection and discrimination based on HIV or AIDS status in the organizational policy and subsequent adoption by many local non-profits and the recognition of dowry violence a specific form of Gender based Violence, among stakeholders and consequent integration in Reproductive Health and Rights based interventions.*

All these examples involved multi-sectoral prevention and response to GBV in humanitarian settings by addressing attitudes, behaviours, local traditions, beliefs and procedures of different communities, bureaucracy and social gatekeepers.

SACHET was the first indigenous progressive NNGO and is still the one of the few national level non-profits in Pakistan that offers maternity as well as paternity leave to its team members. It was one of the few local NGOs that offered internship to local as well as foreign graduates. More than a dozen of our team members and volunteers have earned merit scholarships for post graduate studies abroad and in the disciplines of gender, media and leadership for working within Pakistan.

It gives me satisfaction when I see a sizable number of emerging leaders in development sector of Pakistan who have been mentored by me directly or through SACHET. The replication and imitation of many of my ideas in health and gender programs in media and activism with or without my acknowledgment are indeed great sources of personal happiness and keep on replenishing my faith in myself that in spite of being somebody who does not fall among people of means - I can make a difference. *Besides, the thought that always dominates my work is the unshaken trust in the fact that leadership is an action not a position.*

**Linked In: March 18, 2016**

# **Who are these Medical Doctors in Public and Private Hospitals in Pakistan? (Part I)**

*Disclaimer: Kindly note that Good Doctors doing Immaculate Practice do exist in Pakistan. Many Specialists doctors who are no doubt Excellent and are serving in country and abroad have really worked hard. I have described the process not the product.*

*How many of them actually became doctors through immaculate route remains a question!*

## **Who are these Medical Doctors in Public and Private Hospitals in Pakistan?**

Becoming a medical doctor was my childhood dream. I remember that I learnt at a very early stage that I cannot become a doctor without working hard, rather very hard. This learning was an indirect product of my immediate environ where a lot of good doctors can be seen. Some were in my neighbours and some were a part of the maternal family. So I really got serious and started making “sacrifices” like missing live coverage of the fairy tale wedding of Prince Charles & Lady Diana in 1981 (then I was in class 8 ) because Mathematics test was very next day.

According to rigid principles of ICG, all those who want to opt for Science group in class 9 must prove their eligibility by scoring more than 60% in

Maths, and General Science in the final exams. I do not intend to make you sick and tired by narrating my great sacrifices during matric and FSC but what I really want to share that I took my studies very seriously.

However, what surprised me that many students who were not performing well in the home examination did exceptionally well in Board examination. What was even more disturbing for me that I used to score excellent marks in theory papers of Physics, Biology and chemistry but in Practical exams I used to get just passing marks. Similarly my Urdu was Excellent but I just scored passing marks in this subject. I did pass my exams with grade A but percentage was much lower than my expectations. I learnt 3 lessons from these experiences.

1. Those students who received special tuitions from some specified academies did exceptionally well as paper setter cum examiners were not only teaching but making them practice the paper to be throughout the year.
2. Those students got better marks in practical exams. Because of the same examiners.
3. Change of examination sheets is not a surprising practice. As a teenager I was very depressed and unhappy. I wrote some fiery articles in the Muslim during those years. I was friendless as most of my friends belonged to the category who were benefiting from immoral means of getting through the exams with flying colours.

I came across another disappointment if not disbelief (that was yet to come) when I applied for

admission in the medical college. Then I came to know the following:

- a. Girls need to score higher than boys as only very few seats (I think 8) were on open merit (I have a federal domicile and I could only apply on open merit).
- b. Domicile counts. However, beneficiaries are not necessarily the student from that remote area from where he/she has earned schooling but can be a UK Return student who has never been to that area but since his/her domicile is from that area, the ultimate benefit-the admission is there.
- c. Seats in the Medical College can be “bought”. Some of my friends “bought” Governor` seat.

I failed to get admission in the medical college of my city and was thrown to a periphery (PMC) on open merit. Whereas many of my friends who scored lesser marks than me, got admission in the RMC on Army seat, Governor seat and other quotas.

Students who get admission on domicile basis have to sign a bond that they would serve in that remote area after completing the degree and they cannot be transferred from that particular college to any other college (as that college is closer geographically to the place of domicile). I found that this was nothing but a formality never to be fulfilled.

When I started studying in the college I came across following worth not believing shocks:

- i. Most of the students who were from Lahore and Islamabad/Rawalpindi, managed to get migrated (some close one told me about the

bribes involved) by the time we were done with our First Professional exams, to their respective nearby colleges. I remember one of my class fellows who hardly attended any classes and earned “double supplementary exam”, (because she failed in them in first attempt) was migrated to KEMC as well and she always introduced herself with pride that she is a KE graduate.

- ii. Nepotism and favouritism. Children of Professors of Medical colleges, army officers and politicians got special favours.
- iii. Some Professors and junior teachers were “famous” for their kind heartedness towards some girls.
- iv. Boys associated with political parties (MSF and Jamiat mainly) cannot be dared to challenge and used to get through the exams even those who remained in jail more than in class.
- v. Trend in study was exam oriented. “University questions” (the topics that are most likely to be asked in the exams)-used to decide what should be read. I was told by my sweet seniors in the very first year when they saw me studying “Brain” and that too from “Gray’s anatomy” that “Brain “is not “important from examination point of view and I should memorize limbs and abdomen only for Anatomy”. Further, the probability of getting higher marks by studying authentic books was lower and those who used to “memorize” cheaper editions of Indian books or local guides scored better even highest.

- vi. Top scorers were already decided. Therefore, students like me never got the opportunity of being faced with tough viva questions as those questions were resaved for certain candidates to maintain apparent transparency. In my batch, I suffered a lot through a close relative of then COAS and virtual Boss of the country. It was only in final professional when that General got retired the pressure was released. That year that girl could not score the highest marks (so sad her 3 years record could not be maintained). I am not implying that the General ordered for the favouritism but everybody from faculty to lower staff was in a state of “sijda”.again I want to clarify: honest students do get rewarded but they have to be really brilliant mediocre and honest suffer a lot. Then came the phase of house job. (I have skipped many other details of injustices). There is no service structure for Doctors. Again merit is violated and politics of quotas dominate.

So when I worked at PIMS as an unpaid doctor my one time senior and a known drug addict remained the chief medical officer in emergency as he was the son of a bureaucrat. Many of my class fellows and batch mates got jobs at KRL not because they did well in exams but because they have “nice fathers”. I passed 4 FPSC tests but never selected for any paid job. I was told different reasons. One most annoying was that MY MOTHER TONGUE is URDU so How Can I communicate with Panjabi patients..... I am skipping many details.

One fine day I saw an advert. For live anchors on PTV and a full time job for an American NGO. I applied for both, got selected and never looked back.

My heart kept on bleeding for many years on the death of my clinical life.

**Facebook: January 23, 2010**

# Who are these Medical Doctors in Public and Private Hospitals in Pakistan? (Part II)

*Disclaimer 2: Doctors are also victims of injustices and discriminations within the system. The level of effort does not match with the fiscal compensation and or career ladder.*

Usual Career pathway of those who got jobs in Public Sector:

Not in order of priority and frequency

- 1) Those who get postings at BHU (Basic Health Units) or RHSC (Rural Health Service Clinics) never serve there or visit on regular / irregular basis for the obvious reason of lack of basic facilities. Women medical officers are even worse because of specific gender concerns. During the period of absentia these doctors continue to receive salaries and those who have “approach” get themselves transferred. By then, those who are preparing to appear in the first part of specialization (FCPS in Pakistan) become eligible and are ultimately transferred to an urban teaching hospital. Some exceptions are always there. However, serving at a BHU or RHSC IS NEVER A CHOICE, ALWAYS A COMPULSION. These days FATA is the conflict zone so some medical officers are serving in Punjab or Federal Area not because they want to but

they have to as there is no other option. Usually those who are found there are Doctor Couples which make it logically possible to stay at these posts where there is No Incentive and the overall environment is strongly demotivating.

- 2) Some with more 'approach' get "recommended" for post graduate courses (like MPH) within Pakistan or abroad. Once MPH is done the "chosen ones" get "selected on merit" for post-graduation (like PhD) or some "smarter ones" get their MPH from US (elite Universities like Harvard, JHU) or UK.
- 3) The better and bigger "minds" never return and continue to serve "Pakistan" by settling abroad, lamenting our system and establishing "apolitical welfare and development organizations".
- 4) Those who return either resign or get a long leave or deputation from their respective Public department and start "serving" WB, UN or USAID, DFID or any other prestigious institution.
- 5) Some doctors opt for clinical career and try their luck in UK and US and keep on attempting their entry exams while retaining their permanent jobs until they are successful.
- 6) Some women doctors who got admission in the medical college due to hard work of their entire family and who never practise because they got married to any politician or a bureaucrat or they are from a family of bureaucrats cum politicians may become a parliamentarian, "earn" any lucrative assignment, and so on and so forth.

7) A vast number of public sector doctors establish their own practice in one of the following forms:

8) \*Setting up their own private practices and usually diverting the patients to their clinics

\* Setting up a hospital with a group of doctors and diverting the patients to this place

\* Establishing a consultancy firm and managing to get major projects that work with international donors and public sector because of their connections and competence both (fair enough :0)

Usual Career pathway of those who got jobs in Private Sector only:

Those who are fully engaged in Private practice really work hard to get as many “panels” from public sector and corporate sector organizations as possible.

Result:

There is no harm in making money BUT IT SHOULD BE BY HONEST MEANS.HONESTY IS AN OUDATED VALUE AND DIFFICULT TO DEFINE AND JUSTIFY.

But when doctors who are technically incompetent as well transform themselves into money making machines, the results are more catastrophic than the usual predictive outcomes of being unfair and corrupt in any other area of work.

I have shared what I knew from my times. Recent trends are more alarming. Now there are private medical colleges and self-financing even in Army Medical College.

Now there is more centralization of wealth and creation of new power centres.

In my days there was a small window which allowed brilliant ones from the middle class (now lower middle class) to change their situation (READ JOINING ELITE) through education.

Now that window has become too narrow as nearly all business and professions are pre-determined by the elite family backgrounds.

Dr. Ayub Mehar has aptly pointed out in a report on economic freedom that that now a days the structure of academic institutions has been changed completely. “Now these academic institutions cannot help to bridge the rich-poor gap; they are part to widen this gap”.

What is lost in this journey?

- \*empathy
- \*some potentially good doctors
- \*some doctors join CSP

Waaey nakaami!

Mataa'-e-karvaan jaata raha

karvaan ke dil say ehsas e ziyaan jaata raha.

(What a failure! The caravan has lost its treasure,

The caravan has even lost its sense of loss!)

PS: I never wanted to write this but I am really fed up when people very innocently ask why patients die in hospitals?

How naïve?