

Non-viral writings

A compilation of some published journalistic works (2018-2019)

By

Dr.Rakhshinda Perveen

Ending inequality in Pakistan — Mr. PM

A personal note of gratitude: I am most sincerely thankful to Almighty Allah for creating me with a Muslim identity. My worst nightmare is to be a non-Muslim and poor man, or worse a woman in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

Dr Rakhshinda Perveen

Most of the world is unequal in terms of income and opportunities even though the share of the poor has fallen since 2001 by nearly half, to 15 percent, and those in the middle-income bracket have nearly doubled (from 7 to 13 percent) their global presence.

There is almost a consensus among researchers, practitioners and activists (in spite of some highly misleading measures in economics to measure inequality) that there is no divine intervention in the prevalence of extreme inequality globally that has tripled in size since 1960.

Pakistan too is a casualty of this inequality and is facing a number of problems having their roots in sham democracy and dictatorship. The obvious corollary is a state that does not possess the nerve to dismantle the entrenched discriminations leading to many preventable forms of unreasonableness, inequalities and injustice.

While statistical data (*human beings are not statistics by the way*) may not be available to accurately map the ethnicity and faith-based inequalities faced by extremely poor people in Pakistan. It requires only an honest mind to admit that most of these poor are destined to remain poor, powerless and with almost no prestige, are Christians in Pakistan (by no means I am suggesting that poor Muslims and those from other faiths are leading an equitable life, but I am trying to command attention of those who matter to a disturbing choice almost carved into stone that this particular community faces).

The inevitable relationship between the poverty and development has always been close to hearts of the human rights defenders but is seldom reflected in letter and spirit by the elites, class climbers and deceitful intellectuals who have ruled (not governed) this unfortunate country. And why blame only elites? Non-elites have also mediated fiercely to honour this social stigma that janitors can only be Christians.

I am watching since my childhood that cleaning the roads and toilets, opening up clogged drains and maintaining sewerage are the 'naturally' chosen occupations for the Christians. What is unofficially official is the painful reality that Christians are most appropriate candidates for being a janitor. I have seen generations of Christian people employed by the Capital Development Authority (CDA) getting hired as janitors. This specific cohort has mother and father who live in slums and usually pass on skin diseases, tuberculosis, asthma and low (almost none) social esteem to their off springs who are usually too many and with too close birth spacing. Too few are lucky enough to break this vicious trap.

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As a believer in the dignity of labour I find no problem in such blue-collar jobs. Allah gave me opportunities to study in countries like US, UK, Netherlands, Germany, Belgium (Brussels) etc. where I saw young women and men cleaning toilets and mopping the floors of the prestigious academic institutions and commercial outlets. The only difference between those ‘Christians or Non-Muslims’ and our Pakistani Christians is the fact that many of the former earned their Masters or doctorate degree from the same academia where once they were doing those full time or part time odd jobs. Those engagements were only a mean to sustain them in their struggle towards a better life and not an end –a predetermined outcome by the State and the society.

Christians from slums in Pakistan need to reclaim their self-esteem, human rights that include the right to choose their careers and means of earning. I request the present governments in all provinces of Pakistan, and especially the honourable Prime Minister, to present an unmatched gift to Pakistani Christians this Christmas.

You can do it. Issue an ordinance (that can be substantiated by a public policy and law later by going through all administrative steps) that in the IRP no person shall be appointed as a janitor for more than two years and afterwards the state shall assist the person in entering in another job or continuing the education. During the specified job period (as an entry level job) the person shall be given the opportunity to attend a school/vocational training or evening college. As a perpetual harvester of hope, I am seeing a dream with eyes open that this is the headline of the day; “You are not destined to be a janitor — Prime Minister, Government of Pakistan”.

Mr. Prime Minister, I sincerely hope that you would be able to demonstrate this astuteness and mettle. Needless to underscore that this would be neither an act of charity nor a social nicety but a confirmation of the country’s commitment to the agenda 2030 that is mandated to be inclusive and leaving no one behind in development and to which Pakistan is a signatory.

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COMMENTARY / INSIGHT

Being Feminist

I learnt that effective communication has to be credible, the objective should be clear, attention should be directed towards the content and to create trust the choice of words, tone in delivery and for visual media the way one appears matter a lot.

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The 16 days against Gender Based Violence provide or are at least meant to offer an opportunity to many women who are definitely survivors and no longer victims, to share their stories and scoops too. The pain of untold stories is nerve-wracking. Realistically speaking, it is not workable for too honest, non-diplomatic human rights activists as well as many duty bearers to create a world characterized by equality and empathy.

What remains possible is to continue to expose the multiple layers of injustices, contrasts and insensitivities in many dystopian societies, state and even the organizations and the institutions that are officially responsible for combating discrimination of all forms including gender-based discrimination.

During my 26 years as a development practitioner, I have come to recognize a new range and a new nomenclature of challenges. I have realized that nowadays for urban middle class women like myself who are tied to some (outdated) values and who still believe unremittingly that they are liberal and feminist, it is becoming too difficult even to survive (both on virtual/cyber space or within an actual office space).

As a young liberal, feminist and humanist, without possessing the capacity (not the choice) to smoke, weed, drink and dance (in spite of being a TV person, widely travelled and studying in Amsterdam-these stereotypes are still valid), I failed to reach the heights which my professors and mentors were expecting from me. As a former communications practitioner (TV anchor and producer), I studied the basics of communications and as a former medical practitioner I studied psychiatry as well. Hence, I learnt that effective communication has to be credible, the objective should be clear, attention should be directed towards the content and to create trust, the choice of words, tone in delivery, and for visual media, the way one appears matter a lot.

Being a feminist means that one believes in equality of opportunities (going beyond binary division of sexes and gender identities) and does not approve commodification of women.

I am sharing a couple of things that I learned (many of you know these already but not many of you are ready to articulate, disclose and/or to validate them). In spite of having lived a non-conformist life and perpetually advocating for equality and empowerment of all special women

and girls, I would take the risk to state that: Women are Equal. Period. They should not yearn for SAMENESS and must not waste energy, focus and all other resources in achieving the right for unhealthy choices. Women are human beings and they can be, and they are smokers, drug addicts, alcoholic, promiscuous, disloyal and criminal. However, being feminist does not mean that women should achieve equality with men in being stupid, violent, aggressive, unfaithful, irresponsible, etc. In other words, none of these attributes and actions are feminist acts.

Women (and men and others) should be mindful, observe social care and show respect towards cultural sensitivities (this does not mean surrender or conversion). One can challenge social wrongs without being confrontational. Many young women here in the limelight have started believing and asserting that only what they do and say is right. They cannot tolerate any divergent view and do not hesitate in expressing their huge disappointment towards seniors and not at all marketable (by current yardsticks) women activists and feminists.

The fragmented and funded discourse on feminism, gender equality and liberalism have successfully deflected due attention to a number of heartbreaking realities (e.g. Rohingya or Yemen crisis). A majority of those who are selected for championing the causes of women's and girls' empowerment are doing donors' dependent and driven advocacy. A vast majority of disadvantaged people are yet to be brought even into the fold of development (implying better lives for all). **Caveat:** The selective amnesia in development practice is worth shaming if not criminalizing and definitely must not be mistakenly interpreted as special affinity towards a particular cause that can be GBV, Cancer, AIDS, etc.

Being a feminist means that one believes in equality of opportunities (going beyond binary division of sexes and gender identities) and does not approve commodification of women. This is not equivalent to depriving them of the right to look good and pretty. However, I sincerely believe that just as the veil/hijab is neither an evidence of chastity nor an effective shield against assaults, the showing of cleavage is neither an act of confidence nor courage. Women from show business industry can do a number of things as they are paid for it, but a common woman should be careful about her appearance while working in an office and travelling in a public transport (I know this is unfair and does not guarantee her complete protection either but who said we live in a fair world with mature mindsets embracing diversity, sensuality and sexuality –class and geography do matter). Furthermore, appropriate dressing/dress-codes at workplaces is not uncommon expectation whether in Pakistan or elsewhere. By no means I can encourage ordinary women and girls to opt for risky choices and endorse misplaced use of glamour by brainy women who can influence public opinion and shape behaviour. I hope and pray that objectification of women will not be reincarnated as empowerment (serving again for corporate interest) and being feminist will not be equated as being devoid of common sense and making irresponsible choices.

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Two Decembers, 1971 and 2014

I was one of the few lucky members of Biharis in the former East Pakistan who were then able to escape and landed safely in Karachi, while leaving behind their homes and loved ones.

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For any sincere, sensitive and simple person in Pakistan, life usually remains coarse in all months of the calendar, but the month of December becomes exceptionally condescending, owing to two national tragedies.

On December 16, 2014 more than 100 of Pakistani kids went to the Army Public School, Peshawar and never came back. That massacre resulted not only in the loss of precious lives of army men, school staff but also gave us the heaviest young coffins. Ironically, the bloodbath of APS 2014 was instantly politicized. Some donor supported candle vigils and seminars were hurriedly organized by the usual recipients of their well-intended support. The logical result was earned sceptics, by the common masses. Mainstream electronic media, notably popular and mighty TV channels, looked at the catastrophe with corporate lens and mercilessly made money. Remembering our butchered kids, with music and songs (that too in main news bulletins) and in a chit chat style in poorly orchestrated current affairs TV shows is unacceptable. Since APS involved sons of soil and mostly Pakhtuns therefore, some serious and sincere reflections, still, do happen on twitter and some parts of the social media.

I rarely recall, what I have faced because of my ethnic origin (politest printable words are bullied, ridiculed, humiliated and isolated) in school, college, university, job hunts and other social platforms but I admit what I could never forget , even at the age of 50, are those Biharis who kept on waiting for the airplanes that never arrived –after the calamity, known as the Dhaka Fall in my family. I was one of the few luckiest members of Biharis in the former East Pakistan who were then able to escape and landed safely in Karachi, while leaving behind their homes and beloved ones.

On December 16, 1971, Pakistan dismembered, and our eastern wing became a new Islamic country. Due to apparent dissimilarity in the optics of the two tragedies, geography and timelines, most of the Pakistanis have more accurate or more politically correct knowledge about 16 December 2014 than about 16 December 1971. As of today, there has not been not a single remembrance even ceremonial fateha khawani by any forum that matters, for the martyred army men and us (to the best of my knowledge) the civilian Bihari Pakistanis who supported Pakistan army in 1971 and 300,000 or so of us (also known as stranded Pakistanis, “A Linguistic Minority”, “Camp Based Urdu Speaking Minority” or even just “Displaced Persons”) still “ live” in 66 camps in 13 regions across Bangladesh.

My country Pakistan has yet not acted to end the problem and even the most revered human rights defenders have failed (many refused as well) to show their solidarity with these marginalised Biharis who subsist, with their most fundamental human rights denied.

A Bangladeshi scholar, Iftekharul Bashir wrote in a research study that the so-called camps for these abandoned people are miserable due to aging accommodations, poor sanitation, lack of education and healthcare facilities. Their livelihood is confined to day labour, barbering, or rickshaw pulling and that too with exploitation. In Bangladesh, the average life expectancy is 60 but the average life span for these Biharis is said to be only 35-40 years. While there is some understanding about the hardships that Biharis face, there is no consensus about how to address the challenge. The two most commonly suggestions are the resettlement of the Biharis in Pakistan and the granting of Bangladeshi citizenship to those who wish it. The older generation (who had official citizenship of Pakistan, government employment cards, private business and personal properties-all taken away) prefers the former solution, while the younger generation believes their future lies in Bangladesh.

My country Pakistan has not yet acted to end the problem and even the most revered human rights defenders have failed (many refused as well) to show their solidarity with these marginalised Biharis who subsist, with their most fundamental human rights denied. In my different and multilevel exposures and engagements with diverse political workers, civil and military bureaucrats and other influencers in Pakistan, I have noticed a visible insensitivity and apathy towards this unresolved issue. The audacity of many popular intellectuals including twitter and new age media warriors of admonishing that we (Biharis) must learn to love the people where we live (implying we should not support the Pakistan army even if the country is under attack?) is also worth mentioning. Biharis residing (and that was also not a choice, but a natural destination after communal riots in Bihar that started in 1946 -readers may refer to history) in spite of speaking Bengali with native proficiency could not abstain from loving one Pakistan with her army and therefore could not support their neighbours, their friends, their colleagues, the Bengalis in their war of liberation (an outcome of the injustices to them).

Supporting Pakistani army as Pakistani citizens is pardonable (I think so) and even if not, then at least their next generations must not atone for “this undone sin or crime”. I crave for the day when some government in Pakistan will display the heroism to repatriate these Pakistanis. I further presume that even before any democratic government does it, our fearless army will decide for a decent closure. The least my army can do, is to dedicate a small inscription to the patriotic Biharis in the army museum Rawalpindi, so that the visitors would realize the actual price of patriotism.

Long Live Pakistan

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Dowry violence and Pakistan

Disconsolately, it has yet to be criminalized in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan that has been ranked (yet again) the second worst country (148/149) on gender equality parameters as per the calculations of the report on gender global index by the WEF. This means that the war-torn Syria and Iraq performed better than Pakistan.

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Dowry violence is one of the many manifestations of patriarchal culture that is comfortably integrated in our routine lives. Different structures in development practice and governance as well as the society at large have cleverly assigned social sanction and legal safeguard to it. This custom is not only lethal to the self-esteem, emotional and physical health of the potential brides but to their entire families as well. Disconsolately, it has yet to be criminalized in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan that has been ranked (yet again) the second worst country (148/149) on gender equality parameters as per the calculations of the report on gender global index by the WEF. This means that the war-torn Syria and Iraq performed better than Pakistan. Initiating charity institutions and enabling induction of some women in politics and non-traditional sectors are good optics but not necessarily effective means to abate gender inequalities. Pakistan urgently needs significant steps to reduce gender discrimination and improve protection of potential victims of Gender Based Violence (including dowry violence that is too often mistakenly confused or equated with domestic abuses). This would require courageous thinking and social innovation as preconditions.

Though the Beijing Platform of Action 1995 (to which the country is a signatory), adopted at UN's fourth world conference on women, does mention dowry-related violence in its para 113, it took me, more than a decade to get the very term (dowry violence), included in the official documents about Violence Against Women, of our (devolved) Federal Ministry of Women Development. Working on gender issues made me discover that the concept "dowry violence" is alien to a vast majority of English-speaking elites in the development sector of Pakistan and, therefore, technical and aid agencies too are generally unaware of this form of violence against women.

Dowry violence continues to suffer from marginalization and misinterpretation and due to the over dosage of negligence about the concept. The attention usually revolves around symptomatic forms of violence and approachability to only those aspects of "empowerment of women", that assure, not to bring out, any transformative changes.

Dowry violence continues to suffer from marginalization and misinterpretation, due to over dosage of negligence about the concept. The attention usually revolves around symptomatic forms of violence and approachability to only those aspects of "empowerment of women", that assure not to bring out any transformative changes. This may be verified by any random check of the aid effectiveness, social class of a vast majority of the decision makers and patriarchal penchant of the media.

While working with different legislators in different governments for a legislation against dowry violence, the most common off the record friendly comments were “this is impossible/you are up to destroying our businesses and social life/it is the issue of our servants”. The biases of social classes are often overlooked in detecting and dissecting gender inequalities. There are serious conflicts of interest as well. Who wants the losses of millions incurred by banning advertisements of bank loans for dowry items, TV shows promoting marriage expenses, bridal fashion shows? What would happen to the revenues of the wedding planners, beauty salons and dress designers if suddenly the youth of Pakistan start rejecting dowry and bari (gift items from groom’s family) both? What if the media starts boycotting weddings and the vulgar display of wealth and power?

The abuses attached with the institution of dowry can only be ended when the State empowers women to stand up against dowry demand, injury and death and reporting such abuses. This in turn means that the state and its civil society have to do some deep retrospection by looking at the spectrum of dowry violence. They have to accept that it is rooted in the low status assigned to girls at the time of birth and even at prenatal stage, sex selective abortion, son preference, certain harmful cultural practices like child marriage, exchange marriage, vulvar/bride price, “accidental” stove deaths or injuries, acid attacks etc. lie in this apparently benign practice of dowry that has been systematically institutionalized.

Our legislators have to bring a tough law (that touches all three forms of justice i.e. corrective, distributive and justices in the social norms and practices of society) against the entire spectrum of dowry violence, in all regions of Pakistan. This is possible if they are pushed by a socio-culturally acceptable behavioural change campaign, navigated by genuine disruptors in the civil society of Pakistan. The time to say adieux to the stereotypical portrayal of victims and survivors of dowry systems has arrived. All campaigns cannot be run and won through hashtags and disclosure of sufferers. Instead of searching for survivors of dowry violence, it would be better to look around for young couples and genuinely enlightened families who opted for austerity in marriages and refrained from dowry demand. This may inject renewed energy to dishonour the elitist consensus that has been intelligently constructed and is being carefully executed in the development sector (to save the interests of the classes who matter in this country).

Recently UN Women Pakistan started an exciting drive against dowry demand and related issues. I earnestly pray for its success and passionately hope that eventually a consensus for a strong law will be formed.

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Entrepreneurship and Pakistani women

Dr Rakhshinda Perveen

Does Entrepreneurship whether social or commercial need women? The answer is yes because poverty has a woman's face and mostly women are often not "allowed growing" due to their predetermined role in care economy and unpaid work.

Most of the times women are not even empowered enough to even think of their choices and if they are (luckily), they have to choose between career and motherhood. Thus, crossing biological and class driven cordons, bar many talented women to think of having their own business. This difference is even evident in top ten countries (US, Australia, UK, Denmark, Netherlands, France, Iceland, Sweden, Finland and Norway) on female entrepreneurship despite having strong ecosystems for women entrepreneurs. It is interesting and encouraging to note that India, Pakistan and Bangladesh have strengths in innovation, new product and technology and the weaknesses these countries share include labor force parity and first tier finance.

There is no singular solution to this multifaceted complex issue in an unfair world where every third woman faces some form of violence with little or no support from the state and the society. The financial independence of women is the first and foremost step towards their overall empowerment.

Despite odds, Pakistani women are breaking many barriers and challenging stereo types. There are established and emerging business chambers too. A sizeable number of women, who are freshly graduated, home makers and even living in rural areas, are transforming themselves into entrepreneurs. However, there is a growing uncontrolled and loose use of the word entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship. This sector too is becoming a slave to the hegemony of the powerful in the society. Younger generation of established business or well off families is adopting it either as a fad or a hobby. Women-led and women-focused entrepreneurial initiatives are not at all differentiated at practice level. Rarely successful entrepreneurial ideas are executed singularly by women alone, as usually men, as spouses, fathers or even friends, are leading them using women for attracting donors' attention, if not beautification. The ultimate and immediate consequences are maintenance of status quo and ceremonial changes. The most dangerous one is pseudo-empowerment of women. Thus, women who are in need cannot access the funds, information, support and mentoring they need due to procedural barriers. Startups have emerged as a new subculture and elite academia are nurturing incubators and accelerators. This is not bad if it is not (may be unconsciously) generating new streams of inequality, discrimination and exclusion.

The country needs special and urgent attention by the governments and influencers in business and media to remove barriers to women entrepreneurship. This must not be equated as patronizing behaviour but must be accepted as a change in mindset challenge.

Pakistan with its disappointing rankings on Human Development, gender equality, peace and security is placed lowest on female entrepreneurship index (FEI) i.e. 77/77 countries as analyzed in a 2014 report by the Global Entrepreneurship and Development institute. The FEI does not simply measure the number of women entrepreneurs but focuses on a country's strengths and weaknesses in relation to providing conditions that could eventually lead to high potential female entrepreneurship development.

The country needs special and urgent attention by the governments and influencers in business and media to remove barriers to women entrepreneurship. This must not be equated as patronizing behaviour but must be accepted as a change in mindset challenge. This means that social innovation and trust in leadership of women from all groups and classes are required. This means that an enabling environment that fosters dialogues and free thinking are ensured at the state level. Foreign governments, International aid and technical agencies like the US State Department, Australian award program, FNF Germany and many UN agencies are providing many opportunities for the professional growth of women and youth especially in the areas of techpreneurship and social business. The momentum has to be enhanced and space for social investments must not be compromised due to political, religious and cultural biases and misunderstandings. The experts and legislators especially the women parliamentary caucus can play a pivotal role in building up an entrepreneurial culture and ensure that driven women including those with cultural and physical disabilities are visibly engaged through strong legislation that promotes and empower female entrepreneurship and eliminates obstacles.

Recently I had the honour of representing Pakistan at the Friedrich Naumann Foundation's fellowship for a study tour on women entrepreneurship and economic empowerment in USA along with nine other women who founded or co-founded organisations for a social impact in Cambodia, India, Greece, Germany, Georgia, Honduras, Morocco, Senegal and Turkey. I gathered many learnings. The most important one to me is the re-confirmation that the Women-led entrepreneurship is the future of social entrepreneurship in Pakistan, because when a country invests in women's economic empowerment, the profit holder is not an individual woman, but dividends are distributed in the household, family and communities. I also learnt that even in US women in general and minority women in particular face pay gaps and several layers of discriminations. Feminists women and people are also of the view that female entrepreneurship is different from male-styled business. For instance, more women face ageism than men. There are always more men applicants for a grant than women because women want to meet almost 100% of the eligibility criteria. Men negotiate skillfully on service fees and so on and so forth. In toxic male culture of unicorn companies, where exponential growth is the purpose, the outcome remains monopoly and not the desired social impact manifested as a discrimination free society.

The disadvantaged but determined women must have a seat at the power table and my experience says that they have to do this by themselves with shameless courage and powerful pitching. Being

one woman in the room is inspirational but being there for too long as one is a serious concern. Empowered women empower other women too. Pakistani elite women need to reflect on this.

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OP-ED

Women: Nothing about us without us

Dr Rakhshinda Perveen

**The point is not for women simply to take power out of men's hands, since that wouldn't change anything about the world. It's a question precisely of destroying that notion of power.
– Simone de Beauvoir**

Achieving equality among all sexes and gender identities, elimination of all forms of hierarchy and all structures of supremacy is an intricate enterprise also known as Feminism. There is no longer binary division of gender but women including trans women have yet to transcend the structural patriarchy. The collective equality of all women in letter and spirit, despite variations in the optics of policy and legislation, rankings on gender inequality, human development and economic growth, has yet to be reached in any society. The world is still driven by hegemonic masculinity. The toxicity of foul power is not only prevalent but tolerated too. The attractive liberal face of the developed countries is often blemished by the issues of class, race, immigrants, biases having origins in religion and the desire to maintain the artificial transformative leadership in politics. The global South is not only trapped in the vicious circle of poverty, unending debt, sham democracy, repeated dictatorships, NGO-ization of social development, religious dogmas but also facing a failure to eradicate all aspects of colonialism and neocolonialism.

The portrayal of sexism disguised as many confident women (as some of them at some point do disclose the real story, the systematic harassment etc.) in the advertising and show biz industry; effective funding of women empowerment initiatives by elite owned think tanks and non-profits; visible disconnect of the women who are in charge of empowerment projects in public and private sectors from the communities of women with disadvantages of different forms and tactful assurance by the powerful of the systems that despite some pro-women legislation the real benefits can never be drawn are some of the many concerns that are virtuously vanished. The status quo is not at all challenged or questioned. Resultantly, in spite of glossy reports documenting successful implementation of different initiatives, a common Pakistani woman usually can never think of certain right things for example; leaving her spouse even if she is battered regularly, leaving her home even if she faces abuse and/or incest, having ownership and control of her earned income, property and body and the list is almost endless. The verification of these rather apparently sweeping annotations can be derived from a random visit to any urban slum, village and middle income household in Pakistan, number of out of court settlement of the disputes related to women and scanning the pedigree and networking of the Pakistani women who are in enviable positions. This remains a bitter but unacknowledged truth that many self-made skilled women who are part of formal economy fail to become popular in a talent hostile environment. Mostly those who go higher are those who by choice or under compulsion cooperate with the coterie found in nearly all in office and formal sector environments. Most of the political manifestos and contemporary

contemplation on social development initiatives and even the language of the documents related to the SDGs that underscores inclusiveness and reaching the farthest first, are at large devoid of the will for the reconstruction- the unselective revamp of the society, that is the underlying requirement of feminism and humanism.

Visible disconnect of the women who are in charge of empowerment projects in public and private sectors from the communities of women with disadvantages of different forms and tactful assurance by the powerful of the systems that despite some pro-women legislation, the real benefits can never be drawn are some of the many concerns that are virtuously vanished.

The iconic women like Emma Watson, Angelina Jolie, Melinda Gates, Oprah Winfrey, Michelle Obama, Malala Youafzai and few others do act as voices and agencies for emancipating women. There are magnificent moments created by the # Me Too movement as well. As a trickledown effect, a very small percentage of those living on the margins and those from the urban middle class also benefit and get the opportunity to visit foreign lands and get education, training and mentoring. The smartest among those are taken away from the land of pure (and I am really happy for them and like the rest of us regularly tweet about their gains in those societies). A proportion of those who do return back, however, either never demonstrate their critical thinking to thrive in the cruelly competitive development outfits or the ones who dare to be vocal and speak up on noticing that social justice and social transformation are not appearing in any policy, program and practice are duly rewarded by being sidelined and ultimately effectively excluded from the system. That a vast majority of women even in the developed countries (as women are never and nowhere a homogenous category) remain unheard, is incredible because there is an absence of social justice.

Alas! A successful Aurat (women)March, powerful favourable opinion pieces in English press and appreciation on social media by the movers and shakers in development sector become only short-lived motivations and are too less, too insufficient and too unequipped to give clout to the vast majority of women in Pakistan. The need is to accelerate the momentum, mass and magnitude of such efforts, apply empathy in legislative business and development practices. A common self-made woman on the podium, at the center of the stage and influencing public policies is the face of an authentic, visible, sustained and scalable version of the empowerment of women.

PS: Men globally need urgent lesson in basic mathematics regarding representation of women. Any mention of equality of women inevitably give rise to questions of morality of women. There is a dire need to realize that there is no morality in inequality.

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Workplace and women

Dr Rakhshinda Perveen

In a world where 1 in 5 women under the age of 50 have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner/spouse in the past 12 months; the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with 17 transformative goals, 169 targets and 230 indicators ; adopted by the 193 countries of the UN General Assembly, are weaving an opportunity for each one of us especially feminists to look at it as almost a global victory for gender equality.

All awakened dreamers can at least cherish the imagination to live in an inclusive world with peaceful societies , just institutions and a clean environment; a world where no one is hungry, poor, illiterate and ill; and where all are equal and the farthest will be the first to reach as human rights and gender equality are core principles of this courageous and ambitious agenda.

UN Women in 2018, took stock of where we stand on essential facets of gender equality globally through a report “Turning Promises Into Action: Gender Equality In The 2030 Agenda For Sustainable Development ” supported by the German Government. This eye-opening report reinforced that Gender equality is imperative to delivering on the promise of the 2030 Agenda. In the foreword of the said report, the Secretary General, UN, HE Guterres stated that as long as women are economically and socially disempowered in the world of work and in their homes and communities, growth will not be inclusive, and we will not succeed in ending poverty.

What does this mean to Pakistan and its women? While the volume of problems and layers of discrimination carried by our women from different age groups, geographical belt and socioeconomic classes and those having different sets of physical disabilities, gender identity and/or a divorced or abandoned status do vary, it remains a fact that a vast majority of women are bound to survive an extremely unsupportive environment within the family and in the public spheres.

What happens to women who somehow break all barriers and/or due to economic hostilities land into formal workplaces to earn? The available data shows that only 25% of Pakistani women (total female labour force participation is 25%) with a university degree work outside the home. The data though not vocal on the age of marriage and/or marital status of these women, on their unmet need for family planning does reflect on the barriers to pursue a career of their choice. One of the critical reasons with policy implications is that women face controls on their mobility outside the home and some intersected dynamics in this regard include social, cultural and religious norms, safety and crime and the quality of available transport services. In a world filled with inequalities, Pakistan is an interesting case for studying paradoxical and puzzling patterns of empowerment and advancement. Our country, in spite of having a number of inspirational women in the fields of arts, sports, academia, trade and commerce, is predominantly characterized by systemic and structural patriarchy amply garnished with toxic masculinity and hypocrisies.

For too long abusive Power-friendly interpretation of Culture and Religion has been used as tools for oppressing women. Let's try to look at these with gender lens to enable men (trans men included) to become confident that empowered women (trans women included) are not meant to disempower them.

The personal protection as a persistent concern even for those women who are liberal, fearless, confident and urban is not going away. Today Pakistani Women are unsafe in home, unsafe at bus stops, unsafe inside a public transport and when they reach a workplace, they remain unsafe there too, irrespective of the standing and stature of that organization.

Even an ideal state of governance and uninterrupted supply of monetary resources cannot solve instantly all issues faced by women. We need additional and stronger pro-women legislation (luckily many regions have some with or without lacunae benefitting misogyny), rule of law, enabling systems to ensure access of women to legal aid and continued behaviour and social change communication across the country. Our society is witnessing a huge transition in rituals due to influx of mass media that is accessible to rural women as well and is talking about domestic violence, rape, son preference, dowry systems, child sexual abuses etc.; younger women are claiming their spaces by riding bikes, doing adventure sports and becoming entrepreneurs and international aid and technical organizations are focusing the youth that constitutes almost 65% of this 6th most populous country. A lot of vigorous, thoughtful and passionate efforts are required by the state and the society to attain a sustainable state of status quo change and obviously this would take time and a longer than required time in the challenging political, economic and social contexts of the land.

Does this provide a justifiable excuse to look away from some terrifying trials and torments borne by women on daily basis in an official setup outside their homes? It should be a No. My learnings suggest that women need a rest room (with locks and a dust bin with a lid for sanitary pads), a well-equipped daycare (single moms need them more and let's accept that we have growing number of single divorced and/or abandoned moms in the land of pure,-men too consider using daycare as a part of joint parenting), flexible working hours and an empathetic anti-harassment, mobbing and bullying task force. The ultimate end of getting gender equality needs gender mainstreaming that by no means replace the need for targeted, women-specific policies and programmes or positive legislation.

Our governments with the partnership of private sector and engagement of technocrats and civil society representatives can issue the needed ordinances/by-laws , ensure budget allocations followed by its actual implementation through oversight mechanisms for all institutions where women work or can be inducted. Women at workplaces need an anxiety, threat and depression free environs to demonstrate their full potentials. These arrangements too will not eliminate many preventable forms of problems (not only for women but men as well) but it would create trust about our political leadership and give an excellent image to the country. For too long abusive Power-friendly interpretation of Culture and Religion has been used as tools for oppressing women. Let's try to look at these with gender lens to enable men (trans men included) to become confident that empowered women (trans women included) are not meant to disempower them.

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Dear men, be the champions of women emancipation

Dr Rakhshinda Perveen

Dedicated to a brave man Mirza Ali, a mountaineer, a campaigner to encourage women in outdoor sports and brother of Samina Baig, the first and only Pakistani woman to climb the Everest.

We are living in a speedily changing world that appears, more receptive towards diversity and egalitarianism. The prejudiced mental-conditioning, however, is not going away easily and readily. The merciless misogyny has adequately affected the family, society, science laboratories, art, literature, media, army, politics, sports and nearly all public spaces, workplaces, disciplines and industries. Women including Pakistani women are customarily being ridiculed and relegated in a number of ways. Yet, women continue to uproot deeply rooted patriarchy, smash the stereotypes, defy and dispute the limits set by men-friendly interpretation of religion, culture and traditions.

Due to the collective efforts of many sections of the civil society, many technocrats and many political leaders, candid conversations around the manifestations of abuses are generating in social development, politics and media. All this is successfully perturbing a typical mindset - a mindset that is sexist, opinionated and selectively liberal. Individuals bearing these traits never fail to expose themselves at different platforms. The new age media instantly and ruthlessly provides an ongoing research and analysis through the reactions and responses received to any chauvinist statement, conduct or attitude. The ongoing public policy advocacy for the equitable rules of business and legislation is showing some transitory gains for women. This includes women-related international commitments and conventions, mandatory quotas, affirmative actions and gender sensitive indicators for measuring progress in all areas of human development.

Examples of loss of control and ownership resulting from harmful cultural practices are legion: they include isolation during menstruation, genital mutilation, forced marriage, child marriage, dowry violence, denial of inheritance, denial of the right to divorce, marital rape and harassment.

Research-based evidence denotes that a legislator has a distinct impact on their policy priorities. There is also strong evidence that when competent women have a seat at the table, there is a corollary increase in policy making that unearths the requirements of families, women, and minorities. According to UN Women, 24 per cent of all national parliamentarians were women and only 3 countries have 50 per cent or more women in parliament in single or lower houses as of November 2018; 11 women are serving as Head of State and 10 are serving as Head of Government, as of January 2019. Women have magnificently demonstrated political leadership by working across party lines through parliamentary women's caucuses – even in the most politically

combative environments – and by championing issues of gender equality, such as the elimination of sexual and gender-based violence, parental leave and childcare, pensions, gender-equality laws and electoral reform.

The activism and advocacy geared towards bringing greater visibility, influence and authority of women are not against men (somehow this perception thrives). The role of men can never be disqualified or diminished. We have to work with them – with patience and perseverance. We also have to raise feminist kids so that they could internalize the benefits of having strong and skilled women in society and family. The goal of gender equality, then, would not remain a distant dream for a vast majority of women including minority gender. Men who control most of the resources, are higher in number in all decision making positions and are largely seen and accepted as the social gatekeepers. Logically, men should not have any insecurity and they should have firm belief in the truth that since empowerment is contagious therefore empowered women are not taking away their powers. Since we do not actually live in a logical state, therefore, women have to struggle for taking (back) their rights (from the enterprise- patriarchy).

Imagine - women have to calculate the words and phrases they want to use to communicate their needs and concerns about their own bodies. They cannot (in most of the parts of the globe) opt for a safe abortion or tubal ligation without the consent of their husbands. There are infinite examples of the loss of control and ownership of a woman on her body ranging from harmful cultural practices like isolation during menstruation, genital mutilation, forced and or child “marriage”, dowry violence etc. to the denial of inheritance, denial of the right to divorce, experience of marital rape in the bedroom and harassment in boardrooms and so on and so forth. Even today we come across questions like; whether men would allow/should allow women to work? Or whether men think such and such profession is suitable for women or not?

The time has come to respectfully reject the relevance of such “permissions” and truthfully start believing that women and girls are equal human beings like men, and they can be, and they should be trusted. Therefore, the framing of questions has to be renovated. It should no longer be a debate or riddle whether women should work or allowed to work. Correct answers follow objectivity in questions. We as stakeholders, activists, disrupters and duty bearers have to pose the correct questions. For instance, how to increase the number of women in the work force, how to ensure safety of women while commuting to the workplace and at the workplaces, how to reduce pay gaps and how to demolish structural patriarchy? The shortest answer to these questions may be a suggestion and request: Dear men: be the champions of women emancipation.

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Silence on violence-some impressions

Dr Rakhshinda Perveen

The famine of freedom from fears is spotted in varying degrees on the map of the current world where violence causes more than 1.6 million deaths globally every year. World Health Organization estimated that the 20th century was one of the most violent periods in human history. An estimated 191 million people lost their lives directly or indirectly as a result of conflict, and well over half of them were civilians. According to Global terrorism index, year 2013, saw a 61% increase in the number of people (sex disaggregation not available to the author) killed in terrorist attacks.

While politically-motivated manipulation and terrorism attacks are noted instantly specially by the media and narratives are built about them and around them; the abuses faced by ordinary women and girls within families and at workplaces frequently become a victim of misogyny, morality and masculinity.

In my 25-plus years of working with diverse communities, bureaucracy and media in Pakistan, I repeatedly received this judgement (even from apparently modern men and women) that sexual and gender based violence especially rape, incest and workplace harassment exist only in the reports of anti-Pakistan NGOs funded by anti-Pakistan/Islam donors. Through working with the victims and survivors of sexual and gender based violence, I developed the belief that it is critical to relate to the realities of violence against women, girls and disadvantaged people and communities before being opinionated. The systems of power and control breed and nurture all types of abuses . The validated four modes in which violence may be inflicted include physical; sexual; psychological attack; and deprivation. The financial abuse is also not infrequent, and the potential victims are defenseless and dependent persons including women, transgender and disabled.

In connection with the Gender Based Violence, the psychological violence is most prevalent and most problematic to establish. The verbal/emotional component mostly includes; name-calling, cursing, gaslighting, demeaning comments, ridicule, threats, yelling, lies and manipulation.

In connection with the Gender Based Violence, the psychological violence is most prevalent and most problematic to establish. The verbal/emotional component mostly includes; name-calling, cursing, gaslighting, demeaning comments, ridicule, threats, yelling, lies and manipulation. The isolation/domination includes; monitoring time, physically or emotionally isolating the victim from friends and family, jealousy, and being suspicious of victim's activities. Using social media to smear, manipulate, and/or threaten the victim, using children to traumatize the victim, smear campaign within the family and using law enforcement to victimize fall under indirect abuse.

One wonders if any Pakistani sector, industry, tribe or family where these systems enabling all causes and consequences of abuses against the weak are absent or dysfunctional? In spite of indelible proofs of the practice of many forms of sexual and GBV in our country, it remains a fact that too few are reported and the rate of prosecution of the reported one is almost negligible.

Silence is the most frequent and most appreciated response to any form of violence especially against women and girls. The priceless power of silence in a number of situations in our individual and collective lives cannot be overlooked or undermined. However, silence on violence against voiceless and weaker in the society is nothing but an indirect violence itself.

Not being heard or even punished for protesting is often used as an excuse to observe (criminal) silence. What is even more tragic than violence and pathetic than silence is the selective activism and advocacy of the influential individuals in the civil society for different sufferers of violence. A victim or even a survivor has very little likelihood of creating a clout; hence it remains the social, moral and technical responsibility of feminist and humanist activists to come forward.

Real life is weaved with pragmatism and logic and not with resistance poetry, prose and music. Therefore, the distresses continue, and their discontinuation and subsequent eradication is only possible by admitting that violence happens; it is not a myth and it is endemic.

Current day Pakistan is having many progressive voices and laws for advancing and enabling women to live a life free from abuses. Anti-Child marriage campaigns and legislation, daycare centre at Balochistan assembly, investment in youth by the government and UN agencies, Government's Ehsas program with a focus on disabled are some awe-inspiring prototypes validating that empathy and social justice are the only reasons for any anti-violence legislation or policy to be effective in letter and spirit.

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Domestic abuse

Dr Rakhshinda Perveen

Dear daughters: keep screaming, speak up and speak out – Stay safe. Stay strong.

Men and women both may be suffering in a relationship (because who said women who also happen to be humans cannot be demanding difficult, lack understanding, be manipulative etc. etc.). But this by no means is an excuse for violence against by men on any woman. Abuse should never be justified. However, unlike men, those who have to bear greater burden of diseases, honour, blame, shame, honour and burden of proof when faced with harm of any form in the chaste space of her family or professional space are most frequently women.

A survivor's ethnicity, geography, literacy, class, power and prestige influence to some degree the length, intensity, frequency and response to violence. This is not new, rather timeless. Whether it was a concentration camp in Germany, North America-bound slave ships or World War II Japanese brothels filled with "comfort women", sexual, physical and psychological violence remains an active weapon against the weak, oppressed and unarmed women.

Generations of women's rights activists, feminist writers and artists have struggled for equality and social justice. Tons and tons of documents have been produced from various international forums including UN.

Recognized commitments like the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Beijing Platform for Action 1995 and the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) are in place. These impressive instruments give birth to pro-women policy dialogues, parliamentary debates and laws. All these, primarily, are meant to endorse that women are also equal human beings and they should not be raped, assaulted, beaten, threatened, maligned, decimated and instead should be treated with respect. Sounds unbelievable! One wonders if one is actually living in a modern technology driven and apparently civilized world?!

When a woman and that too with no social and political power discloses her experiences of violence and when the alleged perpetrator is her husband, she is usually not only condemned at family level but also on social media.

A vast majority of people are still in denial when it comes to domestic violence and many are actually doing it i.e. performing a pattern of behaviour used by one partner/spouse to maintain power and control over another partner/spouse in an intimate relationship/marriage.

Our society is suffering not only from endemic violence against weak including domestic abuse against women (mostly) but also from some serious issues that should fall into the category of moral disorders. First is denial (that it does not exist), second is ruthless judgment (that if it

happens with bad women/feminist aka lesbian women), and third is fatalism embedded in conservatism (poor woman was ill fated and she should observe silence, prayers and patience).

When a woman and that too with no social and political power discloses her experiences of violence and when the alleged perpetrator is her husband she is usually not only condemned at family level but also on social media (sadly young couples too are experiencing and doing it) and being social media savvy, their matters are uploaded on twitter and Instagram too. Such a woman may gain some applause from a particular liberal circle (that actually backfires and makes her guilty of some more sins) but usually her life becomes more problematical. She is so much despoiled, plundered and devastated that many opt for living again in an abusive relationship - just to fit in with appropriate social norms. Being married and unhappy in an abusive marriage is considered a better rather unmatched privilege than being happily or at least comfortably divorced.

In a country like ours where medical doctors are not even trained to remain nonjudgmental and know their role in addressing a case of domestic violence, where police, judiciary and lawyers are largely not sensitized on gender issues and media is still largely patriarchal; it becomes almost an impossible mission to even hope for not being misunderstood yet alone getting justice.

Recently a famous entertainer (was one of my personal favorites) was accused by his wife of being an abuser. I am not giving any verdict on any party's innocence or otherwise, but I was just wondering by merely having a cursory look at the twitter trends, the level of callousness that has achieved societal endorsement in Pakistan! People did not even shy away from bringing Allah and legitimizing beating of a woman in His name.

All my life I raised my voice in my limited capacity against such sick mindsets and intolerable behaviour. Even today I fail to understand that why any woman if not guarded by a man becomes immoral and target of all denunciations? What I have understood, and I speak from experience, that foul language and bigoted thinking defines them-the aggressors, the assailants- rather than determining the quantum of evil in a woman.

My idealism and optimism have yet to become old and stale. I still dream of a society where at least homes are violence free and men choose not to throw acid, rape or kill a woman who stands up for her rights including her right to choose and consent . There is no magical wand to materialize this dream into a living reality. All I can say is that keep screaming, speak up and speak out while remaining cognizant of the cost; this would not be an act of courage, but this is the only option we have.

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Happy Birthday Pakistan with lots of prayers

Dr. Rakhshinda Perveen

Pakistan is my only homeland and beloved. I was born in an officially free land that was not under colonial rule. I grew up listening to the stories of our war heroes. I also had the honour of knowing some a bit closely. As a development practitioner and humanitarian, I have had the privilege of witnessing remarkable works of many outstanding Pakistanis within and outside the country in civil and military domains. Pakistan has always remained a source of pure joy for me.

Life acquainted me with many human tragedies and being an ordinary person, I cried a lot, mourned a lot, felt disheartened and at times was angry with destiny as well. However, I can confidently vouch that nothing makes me more despondent than any preventable crises, unacceptable acts of stupidity and violation of human rights including trans people's, women's and child's rights. Therefore, despite odds and earning hardest and harshest experiences, I could not (as of today) silence my mind, shut my eyes and stop myself from visualizing a peaceful and pretense free Pakistan.

On this 72nd birthday anniversary of my dearest country, I am not only offering my best wishes to our dearest country but praying before Allah (and sharing those prayers here so that they may reach the decision makers).

I pray for a Pakistan where laws and rule of law and justice are visible and are applicable to all. I pray for a number of effective legislations for making lives easier, equitable and elegant for the disabled, the disadvantaged and marginalized communities. I pray for a society that does not spend thoughtlessly on weddings and funerals, that believes in austerity and renounce ignorant demonstration of madness and muscle. I pray that son preference and toxic masculinity do not obsess many of our fellow Pakistanis.

I pray that women and girls never have to be seen as revolts, imprudent and sinful just because they believe that they are entitled to their fundamental rights, like access to education, health care, choice of careers, life partner, etc.

I pray that no individual lives in bonded labour. I pray that no child should be seen as a beggar or a worker on the roads. I pray that common people start questioning why children are working in hotels, car repair workshops, coal mines, etc.?

I pray that affluent women/begumaat start rejecting the very idea of hiring young children as domestic help, their handbag carriers or infant handlers. I pray that men and boys who rape, assault or harass women, who throw acid on women including transwomen are publicly condemned and preferably by their own families first.

I pray for more inclusive Pakistan meaning that more poor people can represent poor in the parliament. I pray for honest practices in all domains of national development . I pray for the death of nepotism, discrimination and biases of all origins in Pakistan. I pray for a Pakistan that should be ranked at a dignified position on human development and gender equality rankings. I pray for a Pakistan that remains sovereign and have no signs and symptoms of neo imperialism.

Dedicated to all valiant Pakistanis and especially those young soldiers who embraced shahadat while protecting Pakistan

Finally, I pray for a Pakistan where history is not selectively omitted. In this very context I pray (rather supplicate to Allah Almighty to melt the hearts of those who can make a difference) to never to disown many unsung heroes (and the list is quite long). This inventory would also definitely include those stranded Pakistanis who are dismissed as Biharis. This unfortunate ethnic community faced one of the worst massacres in undivided India that started on 16 August 1946 and eventually catalyzed the creation of Pakistan. Thousands of Biharis who were forced to migrate to Bengal in 1947, stood with Pakistan Army in former East Pakistan and faced the wrath of their one time Bengali friends and neighbours who were then fighting their war of liberation in 1971. With lost identities some 300,000+ are stranded and surviving in inhumane conditions in ghettos in Bangladesh.

Patriotism appears to many as an outdated or out of fashion theme. Such people need to look around, understand the predicament of Palestinians, Muslim Kashmiris in IOK, Muslims in India or Syrian refugees and internalize the value and worth of Pakistan. Dissention from a school of thought that may be held by any powerful is mistakenly equated as loss of nationalism or deceitfulness. This too, needs to be reassessed. Perhaps a deeper understanding rather than a stormy judgment is required. Pakistan is now mellow enough to handle difficult dialogues on issues of peace and security and embrace diversity.

Happy Birthday Pakistan

Long live Pakistan

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Towards an inclusive World Economic Order?

Dr. Rakhshinda Perveen

Let us not forget that we are living in a world where *Mobile Telephones* are becoming more pertinent than Toilets; in 2000, only 12% of the global population had mobile phones subscriptions, and about 60% had access to basic sanitation. Currently the percentage of people with cell phone subscriptions is higher than those using sanitation services. This does not mean that technology is bad but our current overenthusiasm, if not obsession with technology, especially in the domain of entrepreneurship may need a serious review. It remains a fact that today corporate interests supersede human needs.

The vicious cycle of inequalities is intact and misplaced priorities are nurturing. It is time to challenge every such ineffective policy and divert attention to growth and equality. Very often the spirit of social transformation faces a technical death due to several cost analyses. Is it cost efficient and/or effective? It always sounds so demotivating to awakened dreamers and disrupters. The physician-cum-anthropologist Paul Farmer always dominated my premise when he stated that while providing health interventions to the destitute in Haiti, Peru, Mexico and Boston, he never thought whether his work was cost effective. He simply stated that ‘this was the right thing to do and the humans do right thing to do.’

The only woman Nobel laureate in Economics so far Dr. Elinor Ostrom, who was an intersectional thinker, always worked for women and diverse but excluded social groups. The idea that economics was gender neutral did not fit with her work. Her own experience shaped this approach. She was a pragmatic radical and we can all learn from her. She has warned through her research in her own words that “Inequality is dangerous”.

Recently I was honoured to be a part of a distinguished panel, in an international conference, on global economy in DC . Delegates from 24 countries exchanged ideas and meaningful discussion, focusing on the wide-reaching themes and challenges of the global economic landscape. Renowned economist Prof. Dr. Thomas Straubhaar, and author of several books including ‘Radical Justice exposed’, in his keynote address, took up the reality of multilateralism in today’s world and the prevalence of law of power rather than the power of law.

It is disheartening that the modern economic system treats conditions like cultural and physical challenges as liabilities, be it in developed or in developing countries. It’s time now for all such stigma to end.

This platform again endorsed my two most important learnings in connection with women, entrepreneurship and economy: 1: In a rapidly changing world that was once eaten by software

(remember famous saying of Marc Andreessen) and where software is now being eaten by AI, monetized profits rather than social purpose is becoming the ultimate monopoly. This would lead to the death of the desired social impact and there are and there would be increased manifestations of discriminations in our cultures, societies and states. 2: Women-led entrepreneurship is the future of social entrepreneurship not only in Pakistan, but globally as well, because when a country invests in women's economic empowerment, the profit holder is not an individual woman, but dividends are distributed in the household, family and communities.

For any Pakistani social entrepreneur who works closely with many charismatic women and transgender entrepreneurs of Pakistan, the disturbance, both on digital and actual spaces caused by mere mentioning of the words equality and empowerment of women is not strange. In theory, who would not agree that global economy should be more equitable and there should be equal opportunities for all women as well from all countries including Pakistan. War, conflicts or even the threat must not be used as an excuse to strengthen structural patriarchy and cause more deprivation to women and marginalized communities.

Communities of women who face both physical and cultural disabilities do exist in Pakistan, but these factors do not hinder their undying passion for their work. Some credible Non-profits and social enterprises are working with them to facilitate their journey towards self-reliance. In practice one finds clear and not so clear contradictions. Many young entrepreneurs and older elites are using disadvantaged communities of women as their salvation, as their passport to win project funds and gain media attention.

It is disheartening that the modern economic system treats conditions like cultural and physical challenges as liabilities, be it in developed or in developing countries. It's time now for all such stigma to end. If we want to strengthen our economy, if our government wants to reduce poverty, if our leaders want the GDP to cope with the population growth, one inevitable tool will be the empowerment of all women and dismantling of structural patriarchy as an official policy. The time has arrived to move away from an economy that is based on top down directives, inequalities and cruel corporate control. The question is: are we ready to take this intellectual risk?

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The writer is a free thinker and alumna of world Economic Order/Friedrich Nauman Foundation

Pakistan through the mental health lens

Dr. Rakhshinda Perveen

As a perpetual student of life and caring practitioner of inclusivity and diversity, I always study our national policies, strategic priorities and international commitments through the gender lens first. Over the last few years, however, I have started looking at all matters that affect human lives by applying the filter of mental health. Besides reading, I talked with a number of leading psychologists and psychiatrists. I am sharing, using my writing license (if there is any) a bit of only what I have received and decoded.

In this capital city even teenagers are swallowing Prozac (an antidepressant not for over the counter sale) like Paracetamol (a pain reliever and fever reducer- available without prescription). Ethical considerations are becoming irrelevant to most of the health practitioners. Most parents in the cities are not finding time to communicate with their children. Teenagers and young people under 25 years are not only overstressed but are into substance abuse. Criteria of success is money, Ivy league and a higher social position by hook or by crook. Morality is an outdated subject. Suicidal tendencies are on increase. People especially young men and women of different age groups from remote areas are becoming visitors to the Outpatient department of psychiatry clinics of public and private sectors in major cities.

Not only we are facing a precarious stunting rate but a majority of us are suffering from different mental disorders, lack the ability to think critically and challenge status quo. Lot of noise keeps on happening inside our minds. We decide to remain aloof and distance ourselves from any victim who is not potentially beneficial. In the families we know, incest is happening, and different forms of exploitations are being practiced but we choose not to disclose any. At workplaces we witness layers of unfairness, well-managed chaos, overt and covert harassment, toxic harassment, toxic masculinity, distorted consent with logical consequences, and what not, but we continue to secure our jobs. Due to sordid economic compulsions we shut our eyes, pressed our ears only to land in different clinics not only with lots of physical ailments but mental health challenges.

Dedicated to the absence of any street protest/sit in/ mass media hype for supporting all women victims and survivors of violence

Mass media especially private TV channels though apparently working with a lesser freedom (yet to be demystified) are demystified) are setting newer heights of advocacy journalism (to put it mildly). Nothing it seems can compel our TV consumers to demand that stop airing unquestionably befuddling shows under the genre of current affairs. Most of these shows are cleverly choreographed entertainment to ensure disempowerment of that majority for whom the television is considered to be their executive club.

A few dire examples of a muted society that is rapidly losing its collective conscience include instances of mob justices, police violence, crimes like minor child abduction, rape and murder, periodic episodes of off-line and on-line harassment and bullying women in politics, journalism and showbusiness, temporary attention to such topics on social media, criminal silence, selective silence and deafening silence on different stories of abuse.

While social injustices affect all individuals, but it remains a fact that lives of women (trans women included), women with cultural and physical disabilities are affected more. Jalila Haider and all members of Hazara community, Sana Mir and all members of sports fraternity, women in army and police, women in domestic help, women in medicine, women in STEM, women in media, art and literature, women in business and entrepreneurship, women in thought leadership and political leadership, all deserve loads of admiration as they beat all odds on daily basis. These are inspirations in actions. All these women have a responsibility too - they have to build other women and enable them to lead as well rather than remaining subservient or acting as merely the passive recipients of a charity project.

Nearly 22,000 (as per a report widely circulated on social media) government servants are dual nationals who may not have any stakes in Pakistan and are drawing perks and power only. This is absolutely harrowing if true. Towards the end of 2019, it has occurred to me that still there are at least two versions of Pakistan in one geographical land. One is the country for masses and the other is the country for classes. The elite Pakistan remains arrested in hotel-centric, donor driven and dependent developmental illusion, nurturing on ceremonial projects and difficult to defend data. Empowerment of communities, youth and women should neither be treated as a fad nor a fantasy but treated as the sole purpose of national development. All stakeholders must be taken into consultative process through elected representatives of people of Pakistan.

Activists are impatient optimists. I want to welcome 2020 with the assurance that those who have a role in making decisions for us will take urgent and pertinent actions that would create social good for common persons including common women. They have to rise above their own class and ideological biases (if any) and should be able to dismantle elitist and patriarchal consensus as well. Leadership is also about letting others shine and this requires a greater vision and a bigger heart.

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Happy birthday PTV

Dr. Rakhshinda Perveen

A bang in electronic media in Pakistan ended PTV's monopoly in early 2000 that was officially born on 26 November 1964, after an introduction by Syed Wajid Ali (who initiated a television project in 1961). Aslam Azher, the legend, was PTV's first Managing Director, the first Centre was in Lahore and then there was no looking back. It expanded vertically and horizontally. Then remarkably creative, conscientious and capable producers, technicians and performers (fortunately no marketeers then) came together to raise baby PTV into a giant institution.

A variety of sports were nurtured by PTV through innovation in presentation. However, the magic created in airing live cricket matches made many of us cricket crazy. Additionally, Munir Hussain's chaste Urdu, Iftikhar Ahmed's immaculate and Chisti Mujahid's fluent English won hearts even of masses. Dramas with bravura librettos and par excellence direction that brought best out of self-taught performers, constructed what is referred to as the Golden Era of PTV.

My personal favourites that I can recall among drama series include Kiran Kahani, Aakhree Chattan, Khuda ki Basti, Uncle Urfi, Tabeer, Waris, Samundar, Ankahi, Khawaja and Sons, Chand Girhan, Angan Terha, Baa Adab Ba Mulahiza, Sona Chandi, Janjal Pura, Dhoop Kinarey, Karb, Alpha Bravo Charlie, Sunehray Din, and Aik Muhabbat Sau Afsanay in serial and Fehmida ki Kahani Ustani Rahat ki Zabani in long plays. I loved all plays of Rohi Bano, Khalida Riyasat and Tahira Naqvi. Watching smashing Feryal Gauhar and Jamal Shah (together), Leila Zubairi and Hassam Qazi in relatively weaker dramas of Quetta centre and Dr. Tariq Rahim from Peshawar was indeed a visual delight. The contribution of lowly paid but highly passionate set designers, make up artists and camera crew are worth remembering.

Dedicated to that generation of PTV viewers who experienced fixing of civilian supremacy while they were battling with tv antennas on the roof top

Presenting dramas on incest, infertility, war, refugees, dowry violence, romantic dilemmas, historical wars and conflicts, feudalism, and what not, with meagre resources and freedom was indeed a conquest that goes to PTV.

Under Zia's repressive regime, producing excellent musical shows while remaining compliant to stifling political Islamization when classical dance programmes like Payal too were sent to gallows, was not less than a miracle that PTV yielded.

Fifty Fifty, Farooque Qaisar's Kalyan and Uncle Sargam's show, shows by Anwar Maqsood provided us much needed good and therapeutic laughter. Allan Nanha duo (Kamal Ahmed Rizvi

& Rafi Khawar) set new heights of satire and performers like Khalid Abbas Dar, Malik Anokha, Umar Sharif, Latif Kapadia, Zulqarnain, Athar Shah, Ismail Tara, Majid Jahangir etc. entertained masses and classes equally. From Zia Mohyuddin's exotic shows, to the unique brilliance of the trio of Quresh Pur, Obaidullah Baig and Iftikhar Arif in Kasauti to popular shows like Takra by Dildar Bhatti and Neelam Ghar of Tariq Aziz, PTV shaped history and impacted many generations.

The mind-blowing performances of some empresses in singing, like Noor Jahan, Roshan Ara, Naheed Akhtar, Mehnaz, Mala, Runa Laila, Farida Khanum, Abida Parveen, Iqbal Bano, and Bushra, Zeba, Saleema and Naveed in comedy, broadcasted from PTV, are timeless treasures.

Khalid Zaidi, Khawaja Najum, Shoaib Mansoor, Sahira Kazmi, Syed Akhter Viqar Azeem, Syed Athar Viqar Azeem, Qasim Jalali, Shahzad Khalil, Mohsin Ali, Ayub Khawar, Haider Rizvi, Yawar Hayat, Muhammad Nisar Hussain, Naveed Zafar, Raja Musaddeq, Tanveer Qureshi, Muneeza Hashmi, Farkhanda Shaheen and Nargis Hashmi would remain on the top of the list of most inspirational TV producers.

Unlike, PTV NEWS , some of the exceptional news readers like Shaista Zaid (English), Suraiya Shahab, Khalid Hameed and Ishrat Saqib (Urdu), were always respected ,

PTV actors whom I praise most and believe that if they were in Hollywood, they could have won more than one Oscar include Saleem Nasir, Moin Akhtar, Shafi Mohammad, Qazi Wajid, Jamshed Ansari, Begum Khurshid Mirza, Arsh-e-Muneer, Rohi Bano and Firdous Jamal. PTV brought to our homes the spellbinding performances of Uzma Gillani, Saba Hameed, Samina Ahmed, Sarvat Atique, Sania Saeed, Samina Peerzada, Zaheen Tahira, Qavi, Abid Ali, Subhani Ba Younus, Mehmood Ali, Qurban Jillani, Ali Ejaz, Afzal Ahmed, Rubina Ashraf, Sohail Asghar, Mehmood Aslam, Abid Ali, Shahzad Raza, Noman Ejaz, Manzoor Ahmed, Nisar Qadri, Akbar Subhani, Zil-e-Subhan, Shakeel, Javed Sheikh, Marina Khan, Shahnaz Sheikh, Behrouz Sabzvari, Rahat Kazmi, Azra Sherwani, Muhammad Yusuf, Imtiaz, Aslam Latar, Talat Hussain, Khayam Sarhadi among many others. PTV made various writers our household names and most prominent in this list are Amjad Islam Amjad, Asghar Nadeem, Fatima Suraiya Bajya, Nurul Huda Shah, Hasina Moeen, Munno Bhai, Ataul Haq Qasmi and Yunus Javed. PTV gave newer fascination to patriotism through Jeeway Jeeway of Aali Ji, Sohni Dharti of Masroor Anwar and Dil Dil Pakistan of Nisar Nasik. Sohail Rana is still remembered not only for his hit film songs but composing immortal national songs and children's music as well. Kashmir cause was carved into our memory lane through Captain Hamza played by bureaucrat actor Rauf Khalid. Urdu Mushaira and Muharram Transmission have a great contribution in spreading enlightenment through PTV. However, it remains an inconvenient truth that Josh Malih Abadi , Faiz and Jalib remained banned on PTV for over a decade. Writer and actor Mustansar Tarar the famous Chacho alongwith sparkling hostesses like Sofia Shahid, Quratul Ain and Narjis entertained millions during morning hours.

Times kept on changing but PTV maintains its physiognomies; state owned-controlled and restrictive. Yes, there is change in dress code, disappearance of women announcers, unparalleled dramas, shows on music, art and literature, lesser attention to pronunciation and content and hunting new talent. PTV may make feel its loyal viewers embittered due to its deteriorating

standards but its nostalgic value can never be taken away. May you remain young at heart with a new galaxy of super stars and grow old sensibly. Happy birthday our very own PTV.

In 1995, when PTV advertised for young anchors for its new idea - a breakfast show 'Roshan Pakistan'- the writer was selected as one of the four anchors for daily morning live transmissions out of nearly 400 contestants. Later on, she became the first woman solo anchor for the same transmission. In 1998, before leaving for her higher studies, she got an opportunity to anchor live morning current affairs transmission Savairay Savairay as journalist Talat Hussain left it then. She survived two changes in the government during her regular appearance at PTV.

The writer is the recipient of PTV award of Excellence in 2001 for her series Gender Watch.

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People with Disabilities and our Ableism

Dr Rakhshinda Perveen

Dedicated to the nerve of all People with Disabilities (PWD)

Disability affects more than one billion people worldwide and the latter are regularly and repeatedly affected by the remaining 7 billions or so - the Abled. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities includes people with disabilities as those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory (such as hearing or vision) impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. Disability is a societal problem that impacts your economic growth and subtly scans our moral values, level of empathy and sense of prioritization. Available Disability data in Pakistan is somewhat limited and the reliable one is even more limited. It is estimated that at least one in every eight families have a member who suffers from some form of disability. PWD around the world experience significant disadvantages when it comes to health. Their inconveniences and impediments multiply in our country Pakistan, due to cultural, financial, geographical and political accessibility. Getting quality health here is more a matter of good luck even for the privileged in all respects rather than a constitutional right.

Education, however, is our given constitutional right and within our 23 million out-of-school children, 18 million are between the ages of 10 and 16 years. Being a signatory to Agenda 2030, Sustainable Development Goal number 4 about education is also an obligation for the state to fulfil. It also entails that the state has to ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes. The disabled amongst these must not be excluded. The question is does our existing system and structure ensure inclusivity of all in accessing any education facility? Are the mindsets of our policy makers ready to review strategic matters like definitions and data, policies, service delivery, finance, and capacity expansion?

Disability Inclusive Education, one of the deepest dilemmas in development practice, is presently in the attention radar of some technical aid and donor agencies. Hence it is ricocheted in interventions steered by their partner NGOs and other civil society groups. Well informed reflection and realization of the long route to this inclusion however is missing from hurriedly spawned short term projects. No mainstream social and behavioural change communication campaign concentrating on sensitive portrayal of different disabilities in mass media and new age media is in picture. Legislative actions need a careful analysis and public debate. Currently there are 11 laws at national and provincial level (not uniformly distributed) namely: Disabled Persons (Employment and Rehabilitation) Ordinance, 1981, National Policy for Persons with Disabilities, 2002, National Plan of Action for Persons with Disabilities, 2006, The Accessibility Code of Pakistan, 2006, Special Citizens Act, 2008, Special Citizens (Right to Concessions in Movement) Act, 2009, Convention for the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD) ratified by Pakistan in 2011, Disabled Persons (Employment and Rehabilitation) (Amendment) Act, Punjab, 2012,

Punjab Disabled Persons (Employment and Rehabilitation) (Amendment) Ordinance, 2015, The Balochistan Persons with Disability Act, 2017 and Sindh Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2018. The need for more all-encompassing laws with gender integration in all regions may not be countermanded.

The International Disability Day on December 3, 2019 was observed to spread compassion and recognizing the poverties of PWD. Pakistan too remembered this segment of its population, through public, private and voluntary organizations in actual and digital spaces. The day itself does not distinguish between mental and physical disabilities but the way it is arranged by many high profile forums, too often discloses maladroitness of the very choreographers. Treating humans with disabilities without display of one's ableism is a virtue and skill both.

Disability combined with low socio-economic setting is the worst tragedy that can hit any individual and family here. PWD actually climb the Everest of humiliation, self-disrespect, inaccessibility of many forms.

Social exclusion, stigma, isolation and inequalities are not strangers to a majority of PWD. State policies, traditions and cultural practices vary in apathy, harmfulness and toxicity according to human development and gender inequalities indices ranking of the countries. Being disabled can never be a desirable idea or experience even in the most developed countries. However, one of the worst nightmares in our country is to be disabled.

Disability combined with low socio-economic setting is the worst tragedy that can hit any individual and family here. PWD actually climb the Everest of humiliation, self-disrespect, inaccessibility of many forms, direct and indirect discrimination and what not. Some prominent names with disabilities can be seen as silver bullets in this bleak scenario. However, caveat may be observed in celebrating their success. It may be worthwhile to note the class, glamour and networking aspect. Maybe it is time to raise unpopular questions that may make to whom these may concern at least a little uncomfortable.

Powerful voices and agencies should try assertive conversations and aim should be other than getting sponsorship for conference tourism and selfies with national and international celebrities, movers and shakers. They should get engaged with their strategic allies, collaborators, donors and friends to get resources to build ramps, install voice traffic signals, cameras, broadcast public service messages and similar meaningful simple actions to ensure inclusion, protection, integration and equal participation of PWD. There are no easy and simple solutions to end the ordeals of PWD in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. "Business as usual" strategy involving 5-star hotel based activity will never create any correct understanding on Disability inclusive education or inclusive health care.

Disability Inclusion embodies understanding of the relationship between the way people function, how they participate in society and making it guaranteed that everybody has the same opportunities to participate in every aspect of life to the best of their abilities and desires. Our parliaments must prioritize PWD with these perspectives. Our governments are ought to show responsiveness to the

pain and practical problems of parents (especially single mothers with disabled children) of young children with disabilities and youth with disabilities. Special response mechanisms, to recognize and reduce the vulnerability of women with disabilities as they too are not safe from harassment, rape and assaults as patients and workers, are urgently required. PWD should be the active participants (not passive recipients of any allowance) in viable programmes woven with self-esteem, dignity and equality in health, education and economic sectors. We have enough talented professionals within country who, if head hunted and if meritocracy observed, can provide technical support where needed. Pakistan has to depart and deviate urgently from patronizing and charity approach towards its PWD. In 2020, some perpetual awakened dreamers in Pakistan, would once again look towards elite activists and NGOs for actual transformative changes in the lives of PWD and political leaders who could work with and not for PWD.

The writer has founded Pakistan's first co-working and social entrepreneurship enabler space, Kafe Kaam, dedicated to culturally and physically disabled women and trans people.

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The arrogance

Dr. Rakhshinda Perveen

Motivational and inspirational confidence exhibited by leaders in any field not only allows them to undertake challenging tasks but also enables their followers to give their best performance. Confidence, however, must never be confused with arrogance. Any egotistical conduct of a leader can seriously damage emotions and sentiments of those who bear it, besides portraying negative image of the leader. Destruction of the absolutely indispensable relationships a leader has with other team members is never a good idea. According to a scholar Dr. Mary Kelly, people have no desire to follow an arrogant leader. Leaders have to manage the tension between pride and arrogance. Professor Emeritus James Heskett, of Harvard University, is of the view that Pride is an attractive trait among members of an organization; arrogance is not.

The proud contempt of others with the manifestation of a feeling of superiority of one's worth or importance; known as *arrogantia* in Latin, arrogance in French and contemporary English is also referred to as Narcissism in Psychology. There are two types of narcissism namely Vulnerable and Grandiose. A person is Vulnerable narcissist if arrogance is used to compensate for one's insecurity. A Grandiose narcissist really believes to be as perfect as is shown. Chutzpah cannot be detected by pathology laboratory but its pervasiveness in cultures, societies, politics and varied professions cannot be disputed.

An authority on Communication Studies, Prof. Preston Ni, found that in the modern age, sociopaths and psychopaths are usually not the mass murderers as portrayed in popular media (with exceptions). Instead, current sociopaths and psychopaths may outwardly appear functional and successful. They instigate abuse and harm that is often sly, sinister and subtle. The seven characteristics of the Modern Psychopath includes; Pathological Lying and Manipulation, Lack of Morality and Rule Breaking, Lack of Empathy and Cold-Heartedness, Narcissism and False Superiority Complex, Gaslighting and Psychological Bullying, Lack of Remorse and Self-Serving Victimhood. The "Situational" Sociopath is most ruthless of all as Situational sociopathy or psychopathy contributes to many unwarranted conditions, such as misogyny, class bigotry, racism, homophobia, religious intolerance, extreme poverty and structural violence in society. These unjustifiable conditions, rather disorders, at times sanctioned by policies and laws or absence of both, are booming in our country.

Mephitic impudence, that I sensed, in my internal and external environs, be it academia or other formal setups since my younger days, did not recede with time and rise of technology. Instead, media and new age media is exposing its unedited version, too instantly. Campus clashes culminating in the murders of students (who are usually hostilities from poor families and/or from

far flung areas), vandalism, weaponization and politicization of colleges and universities in the guise of student politics with and without student unions, are not new to us. Many who blatantly misuse young students for their vested interests, are towering in our heartless mainstream politics. Quite intelligent and informed people still express their disbelief on many incidences depicting injustice, two-facedness and vehemence. One wonders if one can dare to face the inconvenient truth? Let's start with relatively safer queries: Who becomes a primary school teacher here? How highly capable teachers, even in universities are treated here? What is the merit for getting an admission to a law college? What is the trajectory of the majority of medical doctors here? Parents do not mind applying all types of unfairness to see their children "shining" in academics. Getting into any elite institution is a critical yardstick of success in life. However, the outcome matters. All Medical students are very often considered cream of the society. The truth is that not all have an immaculate route in obtaining a degree in medicine (even getting into a medical college). When one becomes a doctor through cheating and political backing, why public should complain of medical negligence? The purpose of raising such questions is not to blame any particular profession but to look inwards and attempt some soul searching.

Be it the Arrogance of Patriotism, Power or Piety, all of us are being driven by an unlimited volume of arrogance of one or another brand. Nearly all admirable personalities and their real faces are exposed now.

One needs to be honest with oneself to get correct answers. Pick any sector, profession, workplace and use the 7 characteristics stated above as a touchstone. If one does not want to buy in this kind of research based facts, one can recall four haunting images ;1) the expressions on the face of three kids of Sahiwal who saw their parents, uncle and sister killed by the "unknown" and the expression on the face of their uncle after court's decision; 2) Salahuddin- the mentally impaired person (from conventional parameters), who was "allegedly" killed while in police custody; 3) the picture of the kid of slain Naqibullah Mehsud looking at the coffin of his grandfather Muhammad Khan and 4) the picture of 4-year old Jannat, raped, thrown in a well where she remained for four days, found alive and then died in the hospital. I still wonder, why these images do not trigger our civil society? Why is there no non-stop show of disapproval and disappointment by a critical mass of peaceful people? Why these and other similar images did not and do not give sleepless nights to our politicians? I am neither a naïve nor a frail hearted person. With different hats, I become familiar with ironies of life like cases of incest, young girls impregnated by their Mehrams (close relatives), survivors of rape cases, acid attacks, domestic and dowry violence, etc., disintegration of lives by natural disasters and so on and so forth. Together with eternal optimists, I too, kept on trying to work towards a better, not bitter society. After 27 plus years of intensive experience I have to admit that a society where violence and selective amnesia has a normative status and where abusive power is respected can never be reformed.

A sincere (not sarcastic) gratitude to all those young lawyers (who took off oxygen mask from a patient, interrupted patients care and destroyed expensive equipment and lifesaving machines-as per video clips and footages at PUNJAB INSTITUTE OF CARDIOLOGY, LAHORE, PUNJAB on 11 December 2019) for helping me in reexamining the nude realities of us as a nation. That "episode" (not using any adjective like barbarous etc.) finally gave me the courage to deny my own denial and confirm my diagnosis. Yes, my worst suspicion is being validated- ours is a society

dominated by modern age sociopaths and psychopaths. Be it the Arrogance of Patriotism, Power or Piety, all of us are being driven by an unlimited volume of arrogance of one or another brand. Nearly all admirable personalities and their real faces are exposed now. Many idols are effectively smashed and a collective conviction in many intellectuals and reverent ones is rumped. Clay feet were never so obvious and common.

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Abandoned And Forgotten: The Stranded Biharis In Bangladesh



Rakhshinda Parveen December 11, 2019



Dr Rakhshinda Parveen writes about the plight of Biharis that are stranded in Bangladesh since 1971. We are not only erasing the memory of 16 December 1971 but have forgotten the community that lives in miserable conditions despite its unconditional support for Pakistan.

Dedicated to the unconditional patriotism of all ordinary Pakistanis and to the everlasting love and friendship of those who have risen above all biases and do not despise us.

Once upon a time in history, following Jinnah's declaration of 16 August 1946 as the Direct Action Day, the Muslim League Chief Minister of Bengal Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy requested Governor of Bengal Sir Frederick Burrows to declare a public holiday on that day, to which the governor agreed.

The day was aimed to show the strength of Muslim feelings towards its demand for an "autonomous and sovereign" Pakistan. Lamentably, it resulted in the worst communal riots that British India had seen.

When Pakistan emerged on the map of the world on 14 August, 1947, many told and untold stories of lost identities, integrity and humanity were also constructed. One million Muslims from Bihar were forced into migration into East Bengal who worked there as traders, vendors, clerks, civil service officials, skilled railway/ mill workers, teachers and doctors.

Bengalis who were subdued and maltreated by the military and civil elites of West Pakistan classed them as symbols of West Pakistani ascendancy and became inimical towards them.

In the December 1970 elections, most Biharis supported the pro-Pakistan Muslim League rather than the Awami League, which was largely a Bengali

nationalist movement. The fall of Dhaka in 1971, also beached thousands of this community who escaped rape, murder and other atrocities.



The surrender of our army grimaced the status of nearly 300,000 Biharis. From equal citizens and owners of their houses, properties and business, they became stateless refugees. The planes that were supposed to take them to (West) Pakistan, never arrived and they remained stranded in one-room houses.

Due to political sensitivities, their repatriation process that was started in 1974, never got completed. Dishonoured and deceived by successive Pakistani governments, the community continues to live in horrifying conditions, with no sense of security and self-worth. Around 400,000 Biharis are currently housed in 116 “camps” in the 13 different districts of Bangladesh.

Of these, the capital Dhaka hosts 100,000 Biharis in 45 settlements. Pakistani government took away their Pakistani citizenship in 1978, but the Supreme

Court of Bangladesh granted them Bangladeshi citizenship in 2008. Then they were entered in the national voters' list that also enabled them to obtain documents proving their identity.

However, most Biharis are not eligible for Bangladeshi passports because they live in temporary settlements and according to the rules, an applicant needs to provide a permanent address for getting a passport. Deep psychological barriers are always difficult to overcome and most Biharis who experience social stigma fear further retaliation and could not get reintegrated in Bangladeshi society.

By all yardsticks they are the most marginalized people in Bangladesh. These most ill-fated people (as Rohingyas, Syrians, Iraqis ,Afghans refugees, war affectees, displaced people at least command attention of the world) are continuously being punished for the “crime of standing with Pakistani army and being pro-Pakistan” by their elders during “liberation movement “ of Bengalis.



They are not at all acceptable to Sindhi, Punjabi and Pashtun nationalists in Pakistan.

I have full regard for their reservations. I might have exactly thought, acted and reacted like them if I were from their ethnic origin/s and had inherited similar limitations. By this time, life has taught me that Sufi culture is meant for commercial cultural concerts and not to be applied in politics and governance.

The “Mehsooreen”/ stranded Biharis, are perhaps misguidedly mixed up with Urdu speaking Karachiites and beneficiaries of politics of different faces and phases of MQM that once stood for them.

Since I have always lived in Islamabad, I do not feel myself eligible to comment as an authority on the dynamics of relationship between Urdu speaking “Muhajirs” and ancestral Sindhis. However, as a conscious Pakistani, I believe that the outcome of this political (in)enactment is zero attention to practical needs and psychological trauma of generations of these Pakistanis entombed in Bangladesh. I still fail to accept that there is not any collectively allowable and innovative riposte to this decades-old conundrum.

16 December 1971 should not be seen and treated as just any other date on a calendar by us Pakistanis. This day, no matter how gloomy, heartrending, mortifying, difficult to define and defend must never be expunged from our memory and conscience.



Unpardonably, it has been successfully wiped out from the mainstream. I have personally met, seen and heard many highly educated people who do not know the contribution of Bihar in making of Pakistan and mince no words in loathing these Biharis.

Not many know the ethnic difference between Bengalis and Biharis. Many surely believe that our 1965 war hero M M Alam was a Bengali and that's why (rightfully) he was barred from performing his official duties in PAF in 1971. The "treatment" he received in Zia's regime merits a separate discussion. In my younger days, very often, I used to hear "you are fair complexioned, speak clear Urdu and quote pieces from Punjabi literature. You do not look Bihari" as a compliment. I was also ridiculed and scorned (bullied will be more intense) in school and college in Islamabad by some of my influential classmates (from both intellectual and ruling elite classes),who were instructed at home that Urdu Speaking are Hindustanis, Biharis are beggars and do not belong to this soil.

Several times my family and myself endured this question by many of our goodhearted neighbours, friends and acquaintances that what were we doing in Islamabad and when would we leave for Karachi to live there permanently.

I was a science student and had little interest in reading History (especially from the day when the History's subject teacher told us that we would skip "The East Pakistan Tragedy" (a short section in a chapter) as it was not important for the board examination of matric). The admission process to any public medical college, then required to produce a record of forefathers, declaration of one's caste, sect and mother tongue. I personally went through this agony (I would be comforted to know if this requirement no longer exists). Surely, this very experience about the biases (conscious and unconscious) in the selection process was not the last that I encountered later in my career.

This ensconced structural and societal prejudice is not only a source of personal hurt to many of my likes but constitutes a formidable foundation for fostering social and national cacophony and crumbling.

Explicit acceptance of many prejudices and discrimination rooted in ethnicity is yet to be included in our conversations. Functioning doctrines describe a State. Isn't it paradoxical if not uncouth that we are hosting more than 3 million Afghan refugees and Pakistan remains a transit/destination point of millions of illegal immigrants and trafficked people?!

However, our rulers could not create an enabling environment (read political will) to bring back our own citizens whose only wrongdoing was allegiance with the motherland. Past cannot be renovated but it can always be given a new interpretation through the valour to vanquish abhorrence and apathy.

Let sanity, equality of citizenship, veracity and diversity be permitted to prevail. Dr. Helen Reiss, at Harvard Medical School, has recently established that Empathy can be taught. I prescribe this very module for all Pakistanis who are in the corridors of power.

On emergency footing it should be introduced to our military and civil services academies.

Baḡht se koī shikāyat hai na aflāk se hai -yehī kyā kam hai ke nisbat mujhe is ḡhaak se hai

(Ms. Parveen Shakir-a Bihari, a polymath and an Internationally acclaimed Urdu Poet from Pakistan)

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