

# **The Polluted Cultural Beliefs and the Flight of Women's Empowerment in Pakistan.**

Boltay Kyn Nahin Mere Haq Mai  
Aablay Par Gae hain Zaban Main Kiya

**Why don't you speak in my favor  
Do you have blisters on your tongue**

The above verses are the creation of the legendary poet, Jaun Elia. Although these verses were dedicated to a man, Jaun himself, they took the heart of the majority of Pakistani women who started consoling their grievances with them against the ignoble and oppressive norms of the patriarchal society which has been so far unsuccessful in providing women their justified rights.

In our society, when a girl opens her eyes for the first time, the first dua that her guardians shower upon her is "May Allah grant her a good fate". In a patriarchal society, the word good fate for a girl usually denotes her successful married life regardless of whether it cares about her passion, potential, and pursuit of her goals or not.

Here, the question arises about the origin of this mindset. The concept of patriarchy seems to be deeply embedded in the cultural roots of Pakistani society. The ultimate answer to which is "Boys will be Boys".

The recent world economic gender index unveils Pakistan as the second worst country in gender parity. The country has been ranked one hundred forty-two out of one hundred forty-six countries. The situation is worse in rural areas due to lack of education and financial resources. The mother yearns to have a son to enlighten the name of the family. This desire is not only contributing to the explosion of the population but is also depriving the girls of their fundamental socio-economic rights.

To understand the crux of women's rights, we Muslims don't need any international charter as the primary reference. The teachings of the Prophet (P.B.U.H) have already informed the faithful about the importance of women's rights. His last sermon acts as the first charter of human rights, unequivocally emphasizing women's rights as human rights.

“She believed in me when people rejected me”, said Muhammad about Khadija (A.S.). The love story of Muhammad and Khadija still holds significance in breaking the abhorrent stereotypes prevailing in our society. Khadija, the first Muslim woman believer, was a businesswoman who initially confessed her love for Muhammad (P.B.U.H).

Muhammad (P.B.U.H) was the torchbearer of the light of justice and faithfulness. He was the

advocate of women's rights in Mecca. He was the guardian of widows. He was the joy of the hearts of his daughters. Before his arrival, Arabs would bury their daughters alive in graves. He trampled such acts of ignorance under his feet. He refused to kill women and children in wars. In his last sermon at Arafat, he advised men to be kind towards women.

The independence of Khadija (A.S.), the courage of Summaiya (A.S.), the bravery of Khuwala (A.S.), the decency of Fatima (A.S.) and the inspiring journeys of all the great women in Mecca owe to preachings of the beloved Prophet, Muhammad (P.B.U.H) who made the world realize the importance of women's rights in Islam.

Contrary to Islamic teachings and the incumbent constitution of 1973 which claims that "There will be no discrimination based on sex alone", the majority of women in Pakistan remain deprived of their fundamental rights even in their abodes. Thousands of women are killed every year in the name of honor killings in the rural areas of Pakistan. According to the HRC report, over four hundred and seventy cases of honor killings were reported last year.

The men who commit this heinous crime call women their dignified possessions. Had women been considered dignified possessions in the patriarchal society, the murder of Qandeel Baloch wouldn't have taken the whole mass and social media on fire.

The stories of Noor Muqaddam, Aliza Fatima among others depict another side of the coin. They revolve around those so-called educated men whose acts were tantamount to those of uneducated poor while dealing with women. There is no difference between the two for both the classes seem to be deprived of moral education which imparts a concept that just wearing a pride of degrees doesn't make a person an educated one for academic education lacking ethics and morality is merely a poor education.

The above examples reflect how cultural standards highly deviate from religious perspectives. Now, the next point, connecting the dots, is what is polluting the cultural beliefs? It is of course the smoke of an educational dilemma that is burning the socio-economic fabric of the entire society.

Education sets the foundation of a nation, and the foundation decides the destiny of the nation's success. Unfortunately, our educational teachings are deeply influenced by backward cultural beliefs and values. Here, the word education not only refers to academic education, but also encompasses religious and moral education received at home. This educational dilemma favors the notion that women's rights in Pakistan are merely a myth and not a reality.

The poor mindsets limit women's success to the sphere of merely cooking, cleaning, clothes, and children. Those who dare to challenge them are considered rebels among the locals. Women make up at least fifty percent of the population of the country. The majority of them belong to rural areas where they have no right to choose even the life partner of their choice. Hence, mentioning a career would be an odd discussion for them.

Even educated working women bear the brunt of this poor mindset and are still fighting their battles on political and economic fronts. Unfortunately, educated women can contest only three percent of seats for the national assembly and account for only twenty-two percent of the total labor force including men and women as per the UN Women report.

Male-dominated Jirga and Panchayat Systems in the rural areas of the provinces take the fates of women in their hands as compensation to resolve tribal disputes. Vani and Watta Satta in Balochistan and Punjab are the common reflections of such practices. In 2017, the young couple was brutally electrocuted by the Jirga in KPK for showing the audacity of making a love marriage. The situation in the interior of Sindh under the influence of a feudalistic mindset is also indifferent. Since 2019, the Supreme Court of Pakistan has declared Panchayat and Jirga as unlawful but patriarchal mindsets still prefer such councils to resolve their local disputes.

The critiques, supporting the notion that women's empowerment is not a myth might give the references of the former Prime Minister of Pakistan, Benazir Bhutto, Pilot Mariam Mukhtar, Lt. General Nigar Johar, Chief Justice Ayesha Malik, Supreme Court registrar Jazeela Aslam, and the list goes on. The success stories of these women reflect the courage of those men who dared to challenge the oppressive local norms without suppressing their pride.

Today, these brave women are not only the pride of their guardians but of the entire nation. However, their being the first in their respective fields once again challenges the notion that women's empowerment is in the earliest stages of its development in the country and far away from the reality of its success, for real success demands the flight and freedom of the majority of women in the country.

Pakistan will not be able to represent a better picture of women's empowerment until more women like Benazir, Mariam, Nigar, Ayesha and Jazeela step out of their houses fearlessly from every street of the motherland. The myth of women's empowerment will turn into reality when the majority of them will be independent in choosing their career and marriage, when their dignity will be rightly protected by their chauvinistic guardians and when rape and violence will no longer be harrowing to their personal and professional successes.

Real women's empowerment in Pakistan can only be achieved by educating the poor patriarchal mindsets. The prevalence of ethical and moral education as per the Islamic teachings will serve as the game changer to make the country a progressive ground for real women's empowerment.