

STATUS OF WOMEN AND CHALLENGES TO HER SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN DISTRICT BUNER

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ABSTRACT

This work discusses women's status in conservative and patriarchal society of Pakhtun. The research area is District Buner Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Buner district in terms of development and progress always remain under-developed, hence the women of Buner district suffered manifold. Lack of services and opportunities coupled with radical cultural practices pushed the population of women towards illiteracy and poverty. In this work, the challenges to women empowerment have been addressed. To explain the status and prevailing conditions of women in Buner, the authors have used the theory of patriarchy to discuss the culture and society of Buner. Patriarchy is system in which man rules the family, society. The current study investigates that the women has been deprived from the basic rights in district Buner and government hasn't taken special initiatives to empower them. This study focuses on the women status in different fields of society. Secondary sources have been analysed to find out the status of women and hurdles to them. The authors suggest that its need to make the society understand that it is important to empower women for progressive Buner.

Keywords: Buner, Conservative, Empowerment, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Patriarchy, Pakhtun, Women.

Introduction

Pakhtun society in general is very regressive and patriarchal in areas such as Buner. Hence, it is very important to debate and discuss the status of women in Pashtun culture and to raise the issues faced by her in a close and conservative society like Buner. Empowerment is an ability of any individual to control and achieve every desire and success. It is observed that men and women can achieve their desired goals if there are no hurdles, restriction and limitation from the society or community. In many societies, the phenomenon of woman empowerment is a complex and multidimensional process, which covers every aspect of her life. In fact, empowerment of women can be defined as her life achievements in economic, social, cultural,

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religious, psychological, and emotional realm. Some refer to women empowerment their desired life, choices they make, and actions they take. Today many societies find women empowerment and the achievement of the processes quite difficult due to the situation around the globe. We see gender discrimination in both developed and developing countries. However, in developed countries, situation of women is much improved; they can speak for their rights, raise their voices against the unequal wages, scream against the system discriminatory policies, and run movement such as Me Too (Irshad and Samad, 2021).

The situation of women in developing countries is precarious. Particularly, in Pakhtun oppressive society and culture women are killed in the name of honour. They are mere reproduction entities, cooking for whole household, rearing families and sacrificing their choices and lives. In close society of Buner, we see women without any choices, rare families send their daughters for higher education and very few of them are allowed to do jobs outside their homes. Hence, they are socially, politically and economically crippled and disempowered. The important question is that why empowering women is necessary? According to Pakistan Bureau of Statistic, the total population of women is 101.3 million, which nearly equals to men 106.3 million (Pakistan Bureau Statistic, 2017).

However, half of the women are illiterate, unskilled and ill-equipped to deal with any situation. Women in Pakistani society and specifically in Pakhtun's culture, they are just cooks for their families. The men are the earner and this is exploited by them, they control women of their household. In some situation, they deny their women the basic rights too. In addition, only men earning, controlling and restricting women has affected the economy of Pakistan too. The huge difference between developed and developing is that women in developed societies work and earn for themselves, which in return empowered her and contributed to the country's economy. They compete openly in political arena; take part in legislation and policy making bodies. They speak for themselves, make laws to further strengthen them, and also take part in its implementation. They have tried achieving the same status like men. However, it is observed that in developed countries, she has been given the same opportunities at social, political and economic level.

Today women in developed countries are highly educated, politically active and economically independent. They can avoid domestic violence, sexual exploitation, and sexual harassment at work places. Women has been the deprived class everywhere on certain basis, however in Pakistan and specifically in Buner, the situation of women is worst. The developed world has

changed its way of looking towards women; some countries are using them as an asset and trying to engage them in social, political and economic processes. However, in our country specifically regions like Buner the time has stopped for women. Now question is that why in last 75 years' Pakistani society and specifically Pashtuns have not changed their prospective towards women.

Theoretical Framework

In this work the theory of patriarchy has been used to know the culture and society of district Buner. Simply patriarchy means the rule of fathers. The word patriarchy was primarily used to determine the dominant rule by the male head of a family (Ferguson, 1981). In Patriarchal society man controls the whole family, society and state. In Patriarchal society authority lies in the hand of male members of family and regarded as a chief of family. It is defined as a system where men have authority over woman and over her property. Patriarchy as a society of male rule and pleasure, where female members of family are completely subordinated. Historically, this system established itself in the different social, political, and economic foundations of cultures. Similarly, it has also solid impact on modern civilizations. In modern era, the term more generally refers to the social setup in which male member of family hold power (Acker, 1989).

Liberal feminist's stresses that gender differences are not on the bases of biology and women and men are same and enjoy equal rights. If they are not different, then they should be treated in the same way under the constitution. Women have the same rights as men and the same educational and job opportunities (Khan, 2019).

The essential attainment of feminist has been to find out the austerity of patriarchal relation and reveal that such social scales are not necessity, but it is necessary to change the man-made relations. It is a fact that the term patriarchal is also vilifying the strategy of power relations. Male dominancy in society over women hold second place until feminist learning brought feminist people in daily life, for the pursuit of patriarchal analysis, but it is evident that not to neglect the crucial link between patriarchy and subjugation is based on current theoretical intuition. Before the feminist consumption the notion was used to denote the dominancy father over the family and it's all members and household. Dialectic contends that such pre- feminist notion first emphasis on stratified relation among men in legal, political and economic phrases, whereas the structural domination (Meagher, 1990).

Anthropological and historical affirmation specify that ancient societies were almost more democratic and male dominated societies did not develop till the end of the Pleistocene era, which following the social and technological advancement in domestication and agriculture. According to Robert M. Strozier, historical study has not yet elevated a distinct initiating episode of the origin of patriarchal system. Some scholars reveal that six thousand years ago the notion of fatherhood was the beginning of patriarchal system. Male dominance over women was also prevailed even in the Ancient Near East as in 3100 BCE, and their limitations were imposed on female reproductive function. They also excluded them from history. With the arrival of Hebrews they also excluded from God- humanity covenant. The men made construction of the gender difference in masculinity and femininity is the political difference between liberty and subjection (Pateman, et al. 2007). In feminist theory the notion of patriarchy means the male superiority over women in all sphere and mechanisms. Feminist theorist considers patriarchal system as a slanted system which is humid to women. As a feminist and political theorist, Carole Pateman contended that patriarchal system is made by society, which can be quelled by showing and critically analyzing its indications. Most sociological theorist discarded the biological description of patriarchal system and consider that man made and cultural condition is responsible for the gender division in male and female (Sandersom, 2001).

According to standard sociological theory, patriarchy is the outcomes of society which are proceed from generation to generation. These men made patriarchal system is mostly found in conventional culture and underdeveloped economic society. However the message of gender division is project by family, media and other institutions of society which prefer the dominant position of male. According to Aristotle philosophy women are intellectually, physically and morally inferior to men. Besides it women are considered the property of men in Pakhtun society and their role in society is only reproduction and serving children. It is the belief of the people that male superiority over women is natural and considers it virtuous. The patriarchal norms are established in Pakhtun culture, which synchronize the inferior status of women. Patriarchal control in society regulate through institutional restrictive codes and ideology and place the family glory in women virtue. They connected these evil practices with religion and defended it. The evil practices which are mostly occurred in Pakhtun society are honor killing, sexual harassment and kidnapping. Along with it forced marriage, domestic violence and custodial torture also practiced in Pakhtun society. There are various code of conduct in Pakhtun society e.g. Ghairat (honor), Badla (revenge), and Jirga system. These are the traits

which are linked to power, authority and control while females are characterized as inferior, subordinate and linked to men's honor (Naseer, 2019).

Methodology

For this article, the qualitative method has been used. The current study investigates the women status in district Buner and challenges to her social, political and economic empowerment. This study focuses on the women status in different fields of society. The women role in modern era can't be ignored. Secondary sources have been analyzed to find out the status of women and hurdles to them. The data has been collected from authentic research papers, annual reports, books, research articles, newspaper articles, and historical records.

Status of Woman in District Buner

It is observed that status of women in Pashtun society is differently perceived. Women living in rural areas are the most affected by the patriarchal society as compare to urban areas. Similarly, the status of men in rural society of Pashtun society is also different from each other. The disparity observed and existed in the socio economic and political condition of men in Pashtun society accentuated the wretched havoc socio economic status of female too. However, prevalent behaviour is that all men irrespective of class and tribe compel women to follow them. However, this pathetic situation is more dominant in rural areas as compared with urban areas. The orthodox religious belief has also played a dominant role in the divide of women and men. (Jafri, 2008).

Gender is one of the predetermined factors in Pakistan as well in Buner. The value includes male dominancy in cultural and religious level. There is no natural division between production and reproduction. In the patriarchal society of Buner, male dominate and perceived that women are created for the purpose of reproduction and to work as a mother and look after children. She is supposed to do the job of housekeeping while men go out and earns bread. Women have just little amount of authority at private level and men exploit women to have full control over private and public arena. It is understandable that women are housekeeper in private arena. Men at private do not share much burden at home, he earns and spends on his family but he exploits his role of bread earner. He hampers woman's progress and mobility, thus keep her away from economic, social and political opportunities. In some cases, he keeps her away from services like health and education. In Buner, the problem is that women also do not want to change the system.

Due to negative social biases and cultural practices, the women mobility is linked with negativity. The elderly women in homes also preached to the young girl to follow the men and

the ramification of this sort of attitude with men will give you decency and a lot of respect. The women who follow the convention, this will maintain the honour of the men and being to walk in outside home with straight head and sobriety. This sort of phenomena observed in the rural and urban areas have exploited the due rights of women and have hijacked women with the name of pride and honour.

Challenges in the way of women empowerment in Buner

The women in Buner make half of the population of the district, but unfortunately, they are not treated well and therefore they are not playing any efficient role in development process. The current status of women in Buner is very disappointing, women has no authority to participate in family decision making, enjoys limited rights. There are different hurdles that subjugate her. Women in a Pakhtun conservative society like Buner face all kind of hurdles and problems at every level.

Women and education in Buner

Constitution of Pakistan has given equal rights to all citizens. There should be free education to all citizens in non-discriminatory way. Education is the basic right, which should be provided to everyone without any disparity. It is very essential for the development of any country and society. With the help of education, any nation can determine their future. Education is not only to get knowledge but also can lead us towards a path of development in every sector of society. In Pakistan, elected governments and military dictators have never prioritized education. Everyone has given plans to develop education sector but on the ground reality the education sector has ignored by every government. One of the major issues in Pakistan is that, female education has ignored specially in Pashtun society. Pakistan is amongst the countries who have signed SDGs as one of its goal and look forward to education betterment and raising the quality of education, however we are still lagging behind in female literacy rate (Shazi & Nasreen, 2022).

In the conservative society of Buner the female education has ignored. The system, society, governments, rural urban divisions and patriarchal norms of the society and above all religious elites of the Buner are all the major hurdles in the female education. One of the big problem of education system in Buner is enrolment of children specifically girls in schools for education. As per Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Elementary and Secondary Education Department “There are 779 schools in Buner out of which 559 are for boys and 220 for girls. Similarly at the primary level, there are 172 schools for girls, 25 at the middle level and only 19 at the higher secondary level.” It has also stated that 80% of the development funds are allocated for boy’s schools while only

20% is reserved for girl's schools. So it clearly shows that the government didn't pay any attention to female education in district Buner (Zia, 2015).

Despite the improvement in literacy rate in Pakistan, today we are still lagging behind in the race for educated nation. We are behind not just in world but in South Asia too. If we see the statistics of Buner, it will show us that Buner is one of the lowest rank cities in literacy in Pakistan. If we see, the overall literacy rate of Buner in 1998 was 22.11% (65 per cent male and 22 per cent female). The improvement has been consistent if we see the 2019 statistic the literacy rate has improved over all in Pakistan but still in cities like Buner social, cultural, religious and patriarchal society has negative impacts on education. Literacy rate in Pakistan in 2017 and 2018 overall was 62.3% in which male has 72.5% and female having 53.3% while in Buner the literacy rate was 46.84%. The male literacy rate was 65.10% while the female literacy rate was 29.40% (The Express Tribune, 2015).

Political Marginalization of women in Buner

In Pakistan, Women are overworked and burdened with domestic responsibilities within the household that hamper their participation in the politics and political rights. Illiteracy and unawareness amongst women regarding their political right is also a main cause of their indifference to political participation and marginalization. In Pakhtun ethos, females have controlled mobility and they are not permitted culturally appear in public spaces such as politics. It is a cultural acceptance that women are to be controlled and ruled and should not be given any role in leadership. In fact, typecast philosophies about women create main hurdle in societal view about leadership skill of women. The outdated arrogances towards women's political participation affected her progression in political participation (Bhattacharya, 2014). In some parts of Buner, women do not have National Identity Cards and their votes are not registered, which is stopping them from using their right to vote Buner district is among those districts, where less women poll votes as compared to males. Even number of registered female voters was 11 percent less than males despite the women population being higher than male population. On the other hand, right to vote depends on having national identity card. Similarly, more than 10 million women across Pakistani have no identity cards. In 2018 general elections the women voter's turnout was 9 percent less than males in district Buner. Similarly, in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa the women turnout in both the general elections and local bodies' polls was less than males. The Gender Index Gap shows that Pakistan ranked 153rd out of 156 countries in terms of gender equality. The lack of education, absence of transportation in remote areas and lack of awareness votes is the main hurdle in the way of women participation in politics. In

addition to this, hurdles like jirgas and agreements were also used to exclude women from taking participation in the political process. Although the constitution of Pakistan which is the basis of the parliamentary form of government, allowed every woman and man above eighteen years to freely exercise her or has right to vote (Hussain, 2022).

Economic Situation of Women in Buner

Census conducted in 1998 and 2017 has shown that male and female ratio is same as men constitute 51% of the total population and female population is 49%. According to 2022, survey of global gender gap index shows that Pakistan stands 145th out of 156 for economic participation and opportunities. The quality of resources provided to the two genders in Pakistan has created a big question about the gender equality and gender gap. If we compare the two genders the women are deprived from the resources and opportunities on which she can stand economically stable, earn something for her family and herself, and contribute to the national economic growth. If we look at the 1.3 billion poorest people in the world, most of them are women; more than 70 per cent of the poverty-affected people are women due to non-availability of resources and opportunities. Secondly, resources are present and women can use it easily but they are denied of those resources. Pakistan has about 49 to 50 per cent women population, which makes more than 75 million of total population, but still we have the slowest growth because of the little use of human labour, as women working labour force are too little. Women in Pakistan are working in many sectors but they are very less in number. The employment rate of women allocation in the different fields is very low as compared with men. The income created in business, insurance and real estate sector is good enough but the scarcity of female employee are less than male. This figure also indicates that women are economically dependent on male.

In Pakistan the women working ratio is 22 per cent which is low if we compare to average working women in the developed world. More than 40 per cent women are poor and many of them are working in informal sector (Global Gender Gap Index Report 2022).

The economy of Buner rests on the agriculture sector and major source of livelihood for nearly half of the 0.6 million population of the Buner district. Followed by other sectors like mining, Buner has 68 per cent of the country's total deposits of marble and over 1,000 mines according to the local people that 70 per cent of the domestic demand meets. Business in the form of shops and workshops is the third source of earning a livelihood and the public-sectors services (Down, 2009). Women are performing only productive and reproductive role in Buner at family level and household work is not considered in the national statistics. Female labour force a big

problem but it has increased over the years, in 1990 it was 5 per cent, and however in 1996 it decreased to 4 per cent, and then in 2016 it increased to 14 per cent and in 2018 it stood at 16 per cent. According to World Bank, stopping women from working is the ego problem of men, they cannot tolerate women who is earning or earning more than him. In Buner, women are thrown into household works and robbed of opportunities due to men's ego.

In Buner women along men are working in crops preparation and maintenance after harvesting and look after their household duties. Agriculture is seasonal activity and families cannot survive on agriculture alone. Therefore, the male of the families goes to the urban areas of the country or to middle east for working and in the absence of their men, they work in fields and look after the crops. After such extreme work they are not paid. Although they are giving much more to the economy but none of their efforts are recognised or appreciated. For this purpose government and other agriculture organisations need to change their policies especially in regard of women and do efforts to improve women situation for better result in agriculture, economic growth and food security. In very few per cent of educated women are working in different government institutions.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Women in Buner are socio-economically and politically far behind in the gender equality. It is observed in the developed societies that the women are contribution to socio-economic development for regional and national prosperity. In Pakhtun patriarchal society, violation of women's socio-economic rights is not considered violation and they do not have the understanding of human rights and socio-economic rights. Women in Pakhtun society such as Buner are underrepresented in every aspect of their life. Although change is occurring but the speed of the change is too slow as compared to other societies and cultures. The negative religious and traditional perception is changing, they are attaining education with difficulties, and hopefully it will improve their socio economic and political status in Buner. The burden of household chores and inequitable access to the higher education also limited women from empowerment. Education wise enrolment rates need to be increased at all level and educated people needs to play its role. Constitutionally both genders are citizens of Pakistan but opportunity and resources wise, there is huge gap between them.

- In South Asia, Pakistan is ranked as below in terms of women empowerment. Although in Pakistan many state institutions, foreign and local NGOs has done some work in this regard but their work is limited to slogans of women empowerment in places like Buner.

It needs to be changed if we want to empower women, and practical and political approach is needed to be adopted.

- In district like Buner, gender roles are predetermined. Therefore, we need to change the thinking of the society and state needs to adopt strict laws. The state and society needs to engage the religious elite and social elites of the Buner and gain trust and support of them. We need to make the society understand that it is important to empower women for progressive Buner and Pakistan.
- The abuser of women rights at any level must be punished; there should be no solidarity from family and police. Rampant and reoccurring violence will shatter the trust of the women over the system and state.
- Social, economic, and political discrimination of women in any society is possible due to low literacy rate of girls in education; therefore, policies regarding girls' education shall be improved to curb this problem.
- Government programs such as Benazir Income Support Program and Zakat shall be given to poor families who are willing to send their girl child to school to curb child labour.
- In patriarchal society like Buner, male is preferred over female, thus many women are deprived of her share in the family, it is justified by the religious clergies too. Therefore, we need to educate the society by engaging religious elites with social elites and convey a message that it is wrong and against the constitution of Pakistan and our religion.

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