

## EXPLORING THE CHANGING ROLE OF WOMEN IN DECISION- MAKING PROCESS AMONG PASHTUNS OF LOWER DIR

Bakht Roidar<sup>\*1</sup>, Naila Hussain<sup>2</sup>, Dr. Azizullah Jan<sup>3</sup>

<sup>\*1</sup>M. Phil in Sociology of Gender, University of Malakand;

<sup>2</sup>Lecturer in Sociology, University of Chitral;

<sup>3</sup>Assistant Professor Sociology, University of Chitral

<sup>\*1</sup>bakhtgs2013@gmail.com; <sup>2</sup>nailahussain@uoch.edu.pk; <sup>3</sup>aziz.jan@uoch.edu.pk

Corresponding Author: \*

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the extent of Pakistani women's participation in household decision-making relative to their husbands and other family members and determines its effects on the demand for children and contraceptive use in both urban and rural settings. The issue related women empowerment and decision-making power is universal. The issue is also burning in the targeted area of Lower Dir. The social role of women consists upon, Participation in Marriage ceremonies, Participation in Death Ceremonies, Participation in traditional and all types of ceremonies. Problems faced by women in their productive role-play; Women are less advantaged, lack of mobility, Limited education, no access to resources, invisible partners of development, low health, low levels of nutrition, high rates of mortality, male dominancy and patriarchy. To improve the role and status of Pakhtoon women it was recommended that women education should be improved, and they should be given equal participation in developmental activities of the society.

**Keywords;** Decision Making, Social Role, Malnutrition, Ceremonial Participation.

### INTRODUCTION

In the context of social and cultural values, the Pashtun society is mainly patriarchal (Glatzer 1998). The social importance of gender is preset by patriarchal ideals rooted in local culture and customs. There are some prominent proverbs of Pashtun culture that indicate the patriarchal nature of Pashtuns' society. Examples of a few proverbs are listed here which are most commonly known and often mentioned; "A woman is either for home or for grave"; "The power of the mother is limited to the cooking pot"; "the son looks towards his father's field, the daughter looks towards her mother's cooking pot"; "Listen to women, but do not obey them"; "Ruined is the man who listens to the advice of women"; "When the mother has authority, the food is spoiled". According to these prominent proverbs, the ideology of gender is conceptually divided into two separate worlds as men and women. This man-made division of production as well as reproduction has put women into reproductive positions in the private household

as mother and wife, while in other cases, men are in a productive position as breadwinners in the public sphere (Farhana et al., 2009).

Women's oppression/subordination differs in form and level around races, territories, and the urban/rural division. Patriarchal systems are comparatively stronger in tribal and rural setting, where local traditions maintain male authority and control over women's experiences. Women have few opportunities to make decisions for themselves in terms of changing the dynamics of their life. Contrarily, women belonging to the middle and upper classes have progressively access to getting education and job opportunities and therefore can claim greater control over their lives (Farhana et al., 2009).

Kandiyoti (1988) also claimed that in areas such as Pakistan, the secret to the persistence of the patriarchal system rests in the practices of conservative large families. In the given social situation, the role of Pakistani women as producers

and providers in certain social positions has not been given a social importance and respect. To struggle for resources in public domain, better education and skills are offered to male family members. Moreover, they lead the family and make all the key decisions about the distribution of household tasks among family members, arranging younger members' marriages, and running the family assets (Ahmad, 2006). On the other hand, lack of expertise, insufficient job market opportunities and social and cultural constraints restrict the chances for women to participate in the public arena for resources. A Ministry of Women's Development's report (2004) indicates that 72% of women in Pakistan are overwhelmed by agricultural work. However, only those female who are doing jobs in public sphere, which means 15% in Pakistan, are deemed highly involved in decision-making (Mahboob-ul-Haq Human Development Center 2004).

However, through the impact of the media and western culture, the role and status of women in Pakistan, especially in the process of decision-making is changing very rapidly (Arshad, Khanum, Efrogmson, FitzGerald, & Jones, 2008). Many women now have a paying job outside the home, but it is still considered unusual. In addition, women are more involved than anyone else in public affairs in recent times. Every year, they celebrate International women day on March 8 that has been sponsored by United Nation since 1977. Globally, women have more exposure to power positions than they did 30 years ago – from the judicial system to legislature, professional associations to the panel (Neil & Domingo, 2015). Similarly, in view of a marginalized role of women in Pakistan, the National Policy for the Empowerment and Development of Women was conceived in 2002 to include women in development activities, encourage their active involvement in economic growth and decision-making process. In the past fifty years, equality between women and men in politics has developed remarkably in the developed societies (Mestre and Marin 2012). Consequently, the size of female in national assembly is higher and more elected than ever before, and a large number of women occupy key seats in the administration of their countries (Paxton 2007).

The decision-making powers of women through political empowerment are tackled by several

institutional and cultural hurdles. For example, most women elected to reserved seats are usually from political/feudal families: they are close relatives of those who are already active in the government's power structure. Moreover, the male representatives of the assemblies refused development funds and expect them to restrain exclusively to women's issues (Bari, Farzana, Pal, 2005). In addition, political parties are structurally patriarchal and non-democratic. For example, it is widely observed that in 2013 general election, very few women are allowed by majority of the parties (political) to contest on the general seats that reflect a patriarchal pattern where female are holding out of public space (Saleem, 2013).

Previous research reveal that the role of female in the process of making decisions can positively influence the dynamics and outcomes of group. Similarly, in groups where women have equal power tend to decide differently from groups in which women are not equal to them (Mendelberg & Karpowitz, 2016). In both developing and developed countries, gender equality provides the conditions to improve economic development (Duflo, E, 2012; Elborgh-Woytek et al., 2013). Likewise, the presence of women in the labour market has a strong positive impact on fertility and household well-being (Del Boca et al., 2008). In addition, the participation of both men and women in decision-making will improve viewpoints, increase creativity and innovation, diversify group strengths and abilities, mitigate disagreements, enhance the decision-making process and properly reflect the different stakeholders of the group (Van der Walt et al., 2003; Rose, 2007; Profeta, 2017).

Previous research showed positive association of women influence in decision-making with various issues such as with diverse diet in the household (better nutritional status) (Dickon A. Amugsi et al., 2016), economic welfare of the family (Jan & Akhtar, 2008), sexual and reproductive health (Robinson et al., 2017), children's schooling (Gitter and Barham 2008), and maternal health services (Hou & Ma, 2013). The current literature heavily discusses men's lives in different aspects of their lives. However, very few studies have examined the changing role of women in decision-making on their lives. Being an insider I will explore how the broader socio-economic changes are affecting women's lives, particularly their role in decision making. I will look into the issue from

men's perspective. Their views will be recorded through interviews and focused group discussions.

### **Objective of the Study**

The prime objective of the study is to highlight the changing role of female in decision making in their household life in Pashtun society. In patriarchal society women are usually suppressed and kept away from some household decision.

### **Literature Review**

Empowerment of the women for their own right of getting education, health facility, security, jobs, skills, decision making and better living standard, the women should be included in the decision making process. The skills, knowledge, and access to every sort of resources must be provided to every woman. With the empowering to the women community by giving them every sort of right like as education, health, jobs, decision making, poverty reduction and welfare, that will bring economic prosperity and development in the country. Although a lot of studies has been conducted on women empowerment but a little bit work done on women empowerment leads to the economic development. According to Sohail, (2014) that our purpose and objective of this study is to know whether the empowerment of women does it leads to the economic development and prosperity (Oxaal., & Baden, 1997).

The women have to acquire power with appropriation of force and association in basic leadership at home, in the public arena, economy, and governmental issues through women empowerment (Panigraphy, et. al., 2006). Desai, (2010) highlights the issues of women empowerment and change in training, wellbeing, and monetary and political support. Women must have power, power, and inclination in useful and essential choices. Women savagery keeps the welfare of women. Women empowerment is measured through measurements of learning, wellbeing, assets, basic leadership and vocation. Working class Middle Eastern women represent their rights, need social and political change, and take part in crusades (Moghadam, 2003).

The poverty can be wiped out by tending to gender difference regarding rights, assets, openings and political power. Women are unequal to men in all angles in the creating scene. Gender orientation difference is more among needy individuals. Gender imbalance blocks improvement and

negatively affects prosperity of individuals (World Bank, 2001). Education of women assumes an essential part in gender correspondence and training will help lady in securing their occupation. Women are confronting challenges in getting training and seek after professions. Pakistani women need to battle hard with a specific end goal to get their rights (Khalid, 2012). Discoveries demonstrate less power of women in basic leadership and portability, restricted access to financial assets, and risk and savagery of their spouses in Pakistan and in north and south India (Jejeebhoy, et. al., 2001).

Working women are certain about their future and having power over their own lives. They meet their own and family needs furthermore give backing to their old guardians. Education gives data to women about their rights, family unit basic decision making, self-assurance, regard for others' recommendation and data and flexibility in voting (Mahmud, et. al., 2011). Women empowerment can be accomplished by expanding their rights, assets, ability to decide, poise, decisions, openings, and power (Kabeer, 2012). Women have poor access to property and legal rights i.e. land, water and other characteristic assets. Absence of learning of enactment and poor execution decreases the capacity of women to represent their rights (Quisumbing, et al. 2009). With a specific end goal to get to and contend in business sectors of creating nations, women business visionaries need to experience obstacles like absence of portability, capacity and expert abilities in respect to men (World Bank, FAO and IFAD, 2009).

According to Haq (2003) maintained the idea issuing that the major cause behind the scene of economic, social progress is just because of lack of education some sort of technical knowledge of qualified women. And the education is the only important element to decrease the gender discrimination. According to the report of (UNDP, 1998) that every individual had right to education so they would become more conscious for their every type of right and obligation.

### **Research Methodology**

The study based on subjective mode of inquiry therefore the qualitative approach was selected to obtain information from respondents. Simple random sampling technique was used for sample size to collect primary data. A total of 08

respondents were selected as sample size. The sample size was taken from targeted area to collect targeted information. Simple random sampling technique was appropriate sampling techniques for the research study. The sampling procedure was judgmental because of to collect actual information from subjects for the sack of justification. There are various tools for data collection in research study. The most and authentic tolls for devised study are interview because it's convenient to carried out information in qualitative and subjective way. The data was collected through in-depth interview, focus group discussion and participant observation. The study based on qualitative mode of inquiry therefore interview was convenient instrument for data collection. The collected data was analyzed thematically. Various themes were developed to analyze the collected data for the sack of to search and produce answers to designed questions (Subject Cited Issue). The discussion of each theme along with supporting is mentioned in the end of every variable. This can easily justify the existence and collected information.

### **Result and Discussion**

Decision making is one of the important aspects, which measures the relative status of the household members. On domestic expenditures where there is issue of running the household expenses (use of surplus, daily expenditures on food, clothes), women are held responsible. They take care of the tiniest necessities of their households. But when deciding over issues like her children's education, going for training, on disposal of household productions and capital transactions, she has to seek advice.

Empowerment of women in decision making is the capacity of women to participate, contribute and to benefit from the process of growth and development, in such a way which recognize the value of their contributions and respect their dignity (Eyben, 2008). Economic empowerment increase the access of women to economic resources, facilities, opportunities and strengthening of women's rights. It enable women to have control over their lives and exert influence in society (MFA, 2010). Economic empowerment is pre-requisite for growth and achievement of millennium development goals. It work as a catalyst for multiple development efforts (Oswald, 2012). In traditional Khyber Pakhtunkhwa women

have very less chance and access to pursue economic opportunities and decision making. Male are responsible for all economic activities and women depend on them for the fulfillment of their basic necessities. Women spend their earning under the supervision of male partners (Weber & Ahmad, 2014). Some of the respondent declared,

#### **Excerpt 1, 2**

*“Due to decreased agricultural resources, men of rural areas usually go to cities to find work. Women at home are then responsible for farming and cattle care. If we send her to school, then who will do the work at home? Therefore, women are very vulnerable in decision making power in respect of economic empowerment”.*

*“Women are also suppressed and ignore in various domestic decision making process. In some cases they are not even ask whatever the male willing to do. So, this is the scenario their status in decision making process particularly in Pakhtun community”*

Moser (1991) discussed that, there is a deep relation between women economic empowerment and decision making, without women economic stability development is not possible. Women economic status and stability varies from society to society. In developing countries women economic conditions are too harsh is compared to developed countries. Women rely upon male for their economic needs, security and protection. The culture and tradition of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is very strict especially in rural areas, which sideline women from earning activities. Culture of rural communities are stricter than religion to impose restrictions on women economic participation. However, due to urbanization and many other factors many changes can be observed in rural people. This attitudinal change is just to uplift there family economic condition and for the comparison with the urbanities. Additionally, one of the respondent also revealed;

#### **Excerpt 3**

*“In our Pashtun society, people give more attention to male because he supports the whole family. As for the woman, she has traditionally been limited to the house. So this is why the male decision would be preferred. This is not because they are doing gender discrimination. No, they*



*don't. They pay more attention to their male children because he will one day support them".*

Moreover, in traditional societies earning of female is considered as or bad sign for the family and especially for the husband or brother. Female earning is considered shameful as a result they do not allow women to be involved in earning activities. The aforementioned findings disclosed that due to the dominant role of male and the power of decision making women are bound to take permission and are compel to take care of likes and dislikes of males in priority while seeking job or self-business. Findings are in line with (Naqvi & Shahnaz, 2002) stated that, women are dependent on male to get employment and majority of male did not allow women to do employment. some of the respondents stated,

#### **Excerpt 4, 5**

*"Women in workplaces are usually perceived as emotional, illogical and intuitive decision makers. The embedded social stereotype of women as intuitive decision makers could have been influenced by the different preferences women possess compared to those of men in a workplace setting".*

*"This concern for women being considered as intuitive decision makers is consistent with the expectancy-driven model of behavioural confirmation effects".*

Various scholars including Bina Agrawal and Andrea Cornwall has stressed the importance of types of participation. According to them, involvement of women just doesn't fulfil the process- the nature of their participation is equally important -reflecting their role in decision making process. There is a continuous effort to involve women in different kinds of activities and to empower them through the trainings. However, the participation of women, even in normal meetings of sub-forest committee is constrained by various factors such as gender, social, economic and educational status. These factors determine the level of interest of women to participate in meetings and other communal activities.

#### **Excerpt 6, 7**

*"It has been observed that though men are supportive in many cases, deeply rooted norms, customs and rules still exist. There is*

*encouragement but still expectation is there that women shouldn't cross their boundaries".*

*"Again, as mentioned above, a woman has an idea about her husband's interests and she will not ignore his interests. His interests are taken into account even if he is not present".*

It was reported that those women who know have interest in different issues such as forest, village, different kinds of programs or trainings and those who don't have any interest they never ask and hence they don't have any information. Majorities of respondents mentioned that their husbands never share information with their wives but wives have to inform about everything.

#### **Excerpt 8**

*"Women's access to higher education is considered a tool of their empowerment in the intellectual, organizational, social, economic, administrative and familial spheres. Ideally speaking, empowerment is an active multidimensional process which should enable women to realize their identity and powers in all spheres of life, including greater autonomy in decision making, ability to plan their lives, and greater control over the circumstances that influence their lives".*

#### **Discussion**

There are various requirement of modern developed society without fulfilling these requirements a society cannot placed itself on the road of development socially, economically and politically respectively. The culture of the society must have the potentiality and flexibility to absorb those changes which are necessary for development. Women empowerment is among one of those main factors which can put a society on the track of development. Based on literature review this study formulated certain propositions which aim to provide opportunity to women to become empowered by ensuring implementation of the recommendation of this study. Although a lot of research is being done on relevant issues to explore women empowerment, but this study specially analyzed the main aspect of women empowerment (economic aspect) from men's point of view to judge their behaviors and to address the issues in such ways which are equally acceptable to men in order to pave way for women empowerment.

It is an accepted fact that men's migration has something to do with improved status of women and improvement in their decision making power. It has given her an image which is something different from and beyond the stereotype image. However, the absence of male counterparts, although this allows women to accept the role as the head of the household, they remain at this position temporarily, just as a mere substitute (Kaspar 2006; Sherpa (n.d.)). The findings of various studies show that although women act as household head in the absence of her husband, she keeps the important decisions for their husbands when he returns. In the words of Kasper (in Premchander & Müller 2006), women's autonomy is limited to operational decisions only. In the same way in the dealings related to land, house, animals as well as credit are done solely by men. In case of widows, it has been found that either they seek advice from their maternal home or other relatives and friends. I have seen one single mother from Naurikot seeking advice for every concern of hers from a teacher whom she has adopted as a brother. Another widow from Sauru, although she no more lives together with her in-laws, she is dependent on major decisions by them who live in the same village a little away from her house.

### **Conclusions and recommendations**

Gender as a social institution is good as far as it maintains equality among both men and women. Ironically, the links between a society's gender ideologies are closely tied to wider systems of power and prestige which has created gender gap in development. Low status caused by gender as well as prevailing caste division especially for the women from poor families results in low self-esteem which in turn forbids women not only from access to resources but also institutions. The efforts to empower women and to bring them to decision making level challenges existing hierarchies of power and requests equitable gender relations so that women could have control over their lives. It is important we continue to understand men's perceptions of their own masculinities, since this is internalized and played out at the relational level including how they respond to women's decision-making, which may influence their use of violence against their spouse.

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