
IMPACT OF SOCIAL CHANGE ON RURAL WOMEN IN BALOCHISTAN

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ABSTRACT:

Social change is inevitable process of modification of social structures and their functioning in a society. The pace and gravity of change varies among societies due to socio-economic conditions and prevailing social set up. Vulnerability of women is a common feature of our society. She is powerless, faced with biased treatment and is prone to right violation as a result of practicing outdated value system. This unwanted social set up and deteriorating women situation has been assessed by world conscience at many levels. Civil society organizations are actively involved in making efforts to bring about positive changes into current deteriorating situation of rural women in the region including Balochistan. However, a lot more is required to be done to improve women status and giving them adequate space as level playing field towards equity and equality to meet the challenges of today's globalized competitive world.

INTRODUCTION:

Social change is a never-ending process of alteration of structure and functions of a society while making it more comfy and human friendly. In other words, social change is the outcome of human interventions that causes adjustment to both the body and soul of society and requires efforts to make it secure and supportive for the interests of mankind particularly to marginalized and deprived segments of population such as women and minorities etc.

THE BASIC CONCEPT OF SOCIAL CHANGE:

Human societies have never been stagnant altogether. It has been

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and will remain dynamic. This very nature of its dynamism brings about changes into its basic structures and functions. The occurrence of social change is a salient feature of today's competitive world as evidences shows that changes have been taking place in all societies around the globe. *However, its pace, tempo, intensity and nature varies among societies across continents depending on their socio-economic condition and geo-political importance at one given point of time.* The planned strive for brining about social changes relatively disturb life lesser than those that are not planned. Lenski Gerhard in his book "Human Societies" states, "Social change can cause social problems if not properly planned because any new interventions can cause impact over stability of society"¹. The planned changes for having alternate view of the new scenario receives acceptance and social sanctioning, therefore, do not always lead to controversies, and thus may not cause confusion. The unplanned change, on the contrary, faces resistance and seldom receives wider popularity. Even though, social change causes social problems, it also prepares grounds for occurrence of new changes. For instance, moving from agrarian society to industrial one has changed Japanese society by replacing the practicing value system of respecting people on the basis of their age to their productivity. The more productive man or woman receives more respect than how old they are"² At the beginning of this paradigm shift, Japanese and other westernized world communities have faced multifaceted problem while dealing with one another. However, with the passage of time the new value system got settled and become part of identity of modern societies. The International Encyclopedia of social sciences in its volume 13-14 defines social change as "by social change" is meant only such alteration as occur in social organizations i.e. the structure and functions of a society. The structure of society includes institutions such as families, economic patterns and culture, whereas functions refer to activities that are performed by specific structures.³ Another profound author 'Parsons' in his famous book "" *the systems of modern societies*"" describes the necessary structure and functions as values and practices that are common to all. Community as structure plays the role of integration and functions are the activities that it performs to maintain relationships among certain components and provide social control within that community. The economy as structure plays the role of adaptation, while functioning to seek resources from environment.

converting them to usable form and distribute them to rest of system, and system means every individual human soul of a society"⁴. This definition further illustrates occurrence of change in human societies as natural process towards undefined ultimate ends.

Apart from complex and never ending debate of social structure and functions, there are certain basic questions, which are associated to social change occurrence. For example, what is the direction of change and where would it lead us? What are the sources of change? What are the causes of social change? And finally, the challenging question of can we regulate and guide it in the direction of our heart's desires? These and many other basic questions need to be answered because social change is certain, which tremble social life.

ROLE AND STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE PROVINCE:

The status of women is always questioned in our society due to her deplorable socio-economic conditions. Despite of the fact that she plays the most important role of sustaining family life, she is not consulted in almost all matters of life. Gender based discriminations hamper her efforts in all sphere of life. At her childhood, she is always under pressure of her male siblings. She relatively receives lesser love/ affection, food, healthcare facilities and even group expectations for her future independent life. At her younger age, she has limited choices for her education and training and is mostly forced to use her political right i.e. voting according to choices of her male family members. Even her political participation in local government system is questioned, as she remains passive during the entire process of local governance. At her elder age, she is expected to spare her life for her offspring and their future career. "Women due to patriarchal domains are confined to a position that is characterized by powerlessness, restricted movement and continued denial of their potential. The prevailing situation in turns has negative repercussion on their capacity to contribute to family and community well being and to benefit from and participate effectively in socio-economic development processes"⁵ At official level the deteriorating situation of rural women has been assessed. The official site of Government of Balochistan states that "everyday reality in Balochistan leads to the conclusion that development needs to be directed towards the uplift of women. Women's equal participation is also fully supported by Islamic

teachings and by Pakistan's legislation. Islamic teachings exemplify justice and equality for women, while in the Constitution of Pakistan the full participation of women next to men is endorsed⁶. In addition there is the economic angle: if women's contribution to the economy is recognized and if women are enabled to utilize their potential in all sphere of life, it would mean an enormous capacity increase for the economic development of Balochistan. "Women social status and economic role vary within the different groups according to the various practicing customs, mode of livelihood and levels of economic well being. However one significant fact which stands out as a common feature is their relative lack of power vis-à-vis men"⁷. Baloch and Pashtoon are two of major native tribes dwelling in Balochistan for centuries. "It is the largest province of Pakistan, comprising 44% or 347,200 sq. kms of the total landmass of Pakistan; however, its population according to census of 1998 is 6.5 million"⁸. The scattered population feature of province has since long been hindering its physical development as she receives the least part of financial resources from federal Government.

Baloch tribes are largely classified into two major groups of Baloch and Brahvis on the basis of their peculiar language they speak. "All major tribes of Baloch settled in Pakistani Balochistan can be categorized into 17 sub tribes each headed by a Sardar or Chief"⁹. Among Pashtoon tribes Sardar and Nawab though had been very prominent, at present however, they do not enjoy their luxurious life, but still receive warm welcome among members of their respective particular sub tribe as informal tribal bigwig.

PREVAILING VALUE SYSTEMS AND WOMEN VULNERABILITY:

There is a complex range of *riwaj*, (customs) and values rooted in the cultural traditions manifesting the beliefs, perceptions and worldview of the people of Balochistan. "The customs not only regulate day-to-day life of a common person but also help the tribes to maintain their identity, unity and continuity of form and substance. Primeval customs are some times strangely bemused with religious (Islamic) traditions to earn social acceptance. Being a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society a range of customs and values are functioning in various cultures and subcultures in Balochistan"¹⁰. While analyzing these customs and values in its totality from the perspective of gender, it is evident that they are not supportive to

women and their live. Rather, these value systems hamper the efforts of women for enjoying equal share in the society. Major R.T.I Rigway in her book, *The Pathan*, states, "Women do not participate in any event in the presence of male, but is confine to only traditional events. Her life is impound to only domestic affairs at household level, however, she is treated badly like animals by male particularly her husband and they can hardly influence their husband in family life"¹¹. However, it is worth mention to illustrate that this situation is not prevailing in any particular area, it is common among all rural set up in the province irrespective of their social conditions.

Vulvar as tradition is still practiced among most tribes in rural areas particularly among Pashtoon communities. This outdated tradition besides causing social evils has also been threatening status of young girl and women. Payment of large amount of vulvar reveals man's attitude towards women status as nothing but commodity. She therefore, has very little say during her entire marital life. Consequently, she gets exploited and her rights are widely violated at family and community level. Forced early marriages, exchange marriages locally know as *Char Pa chari* or *Sari / Badli* and other similar issues still prevail in the province among both Baloch and Pashtoon tribes. Regular practice of such inhumane tradition might not be documented by any source to analyze its intensity, but this is fact that such value system is still practised.

Women among Baloch tribes face similar inhumane issues in the male dominated agrarian social set up. Apart from her dependency over her male counterpart, her life is tantalized due to never-ending gender based discrimination that accompanies during her entire life. The brutal act of Honor killing, for instance, is still practiced. For protection of vested economic interests of culprit man, innocent woman gets killed not only in various administrative set up of the province. The 1st quarterly progress report of OXFAM-GB, 2006 reports "according to the tribal values both of the parties committing fornication must be given the penalty of death in case it is proved or clearly observed. This custom is not only barbaric in its nature rather several crimes are committed in the disguise of honor killing"¹². In most of the situations man flees or is told of having fled away while a woman is almost always killed due to *purda* and mobility constrains. In worst cases a man kills another man for tribal or political reasons or for personal vengeance and then kills his closest

kin, usually sister, pull their dead bodies closer and puts false charges of adultery to save his neck.

IMPACT OF ONGOING PRACTICES:

The ongoing outdated practice of discriminatory value systems reflects vulnerability of women in almost all districts of the province. Another alarming feature of women terrible status in the province is that neither her voice is echoed nor she has substantial social and legal protective shields. For instance, despite of knowing that the entire environment is not friendly for her life and its affairs, she is forced to obey orders of her male counterpart. Inhumane treatment with women is one salient feature of our rural set up; the decree and intensity may vary from place to place. Aziz Bugti in (Balochistan ka Siasi Culture aur Qabaili Nizzam) states, "Women are never given any formal position either in Pashtun or in Baloch-Brahui tribal systems. However, in Baloch nomadic tribes the wife of a *Sardar*, *Godi*, has a significant position. The women and men of that tribe respect her and in some of the minor cases pertaining to women she is authorized to make some decisions"¹³. Nonetheless, this is few of odd examples that prevail in many part of the province.

The entire scenario represents a situation that raises basic challenging questions like why women are treated indifferently in general. Why she receives discriminatory social behavior in matters of social life? Why she is not economically independence despite having similar competence and skills as her male competitor have? Is that a major weakness in our prevailing mindset and social structure? These and many more basic questions have been demanding our existing intellectual discourses and social fabric to give our current value systems and practice a second thought. She deserves equal treatment in order to enable her play her role in different sector of life. She also deserves to be helped in order to face the challenges of new globalized world.

CIVIL SOCIETY RESPONSES:

Almost all major actor of civil society of province particularly NGOs have since long been making strive to bring about changes into current state of women and their deteriorating socio-economic condition. Many projects have been undertaken during the past and ongoing decade pertaining to empower women, change the conventional biased mindset of

male and practicing value system that restrict women's role and tantalize their live. Besides NGOs another vigorous actor of civil society the media seemed adequately sensitized in taking up the issue of women and converting opinion of masses towards women friendly environment in all sphere of life. For ensuring women representation at local Government level, the new system has provided enough space; however, lots more are required to make women participation meaningful in decision making and serving constituencies.

Other actor of civil society has also been supporting women empowerment efforts in the province. Bar Association, for instance, is taking up issue to support NGO's effort.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Impact study of social change is relatively a difficult task. One of the obvious reasons behind this difficulty is that a process can hardly be monitored with somewhat already designed parameters, however, impact study does require baseline information / benchmark for comparing the changed situation with the previous one. The issue can logically be handled through developing indicators for gauging social change. These indicators may vary depending on what aspect of impact is to be studied.

Indeed, there is no controversy among socially responsible individuals and groups of masses that prevailing status of women is deplorable vis-à-vis men and women of other nation states. There might be some disagreement among masses about this rational discourse, which is mostly found among less educated segment of population and semi-tribal social set up. But the fact remains solid that women live a terrible life, which is characterized through her vulnerability and risky life as a result of traditional practices.

It was observed during entire study that majority of women were quite happy and responsive to the ongoing process of social change. However, the kind of reservation commonly found among them was slow pace of social change. It was suggested that more rigorous and focused interventions need to be made. It was also suggested that social problems such as mass poverty, illiteracy and ignorance should be focused in order to best addressing major causes that hamper occurrence of social change. It was evident that economic independence helps engulf the gaps found on gender basis.

SUGGESTIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS:

Based upon the findings of study the following general and well as specific pragmatic recommendation is made.

Generally speaking, there is a wide gap between analysis of present situation of women and efforts being made to minimize it. Clarity is needed to focus findings of women situation and communicating it to build consensus among all concerned quarters. Once this consensus is build up specific themes and fields of interventions should be designed to be executed by various stakeholders. Delegation of relevant role according to existing capacities of different stakeholders will definitely help make efforts result oriented that may lead to bring about positive changes.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Educational institutions particularly at tertiary level should encourage researchers to come up with studies pertaining to clarify women situation and their issues.
- Civil society organizations for being conscience of the society should take up the issue of women's deteriorating situation in its totality, advocate and lobby around it to build pressure for influencing decision making mechanism at all levels.
- The present trend of project based short term interventions may be given a second thought, which would definitely help revive our approach and make it effective and sustainable.
- Besides NGOs and other people organizations, media being more advantageous actor of civil society should give special attention towards women and organizations that are working to improve vulnerability of rural women in the province.
- Political parties must also give extra time, energy and resources to encourage women come forward through political avenues to contribute in efforts of improving situation of rural women. Taking up the issues of improving women situation must be made part of election manifesto and party's constitution.
- Religious educational institutions, leaders and parties should create enough space in their present work approach towards improvement of role and status of women. The attitude of labeling cultural hindrance as religious limitations requires now to be given up, which will help in

spreading the essence of tolerance and co-existence among dominating males.

- The prevailing deteriorating situation of rural women can be improved provided that Government becomes responsive to the need of women. Improvement of accessibility to basic services particularly education and health facilities must be dealt with on priority basis. Rather womenfolk must be given extra attention and facilities so that they can come forward and continue their educational career.
 - The existing laws particularly the newly approved "women protection bill" should be effectively enforced in order to minimize incidences of women rights violation such as honor killing, unmatched forced exchange marriage and Wulvar etc that have outdated traditional covering shield.
 - Private sector should make additional investment for increasing enrollment into primary education. Their efforts should be supported by the government through educational friendly policies and resource allocation. Attainment of target of Millennium Development Goals MDGs by 2015 toward cent percent enrollment is a good opportunity in this regard.
 - Women particularly young educated girls should come forward and take initiatives. Success stories of all such women need to be presented widely as role model for setting up trends to be followed by the upcoming generations.
 - Elected women of local bodies' representatives should be given adequate chance to highlight issues of women vulnerability. Specific women related projects may be given top priority in local government decisions and pragmatic efforts with particular focus on cottage industry along with improved marketing mechanism in order to get better means of livelihood to minimize women's economic dependency.
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