**The past, present and future of gender-based victimization (Part 1)**

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Gender inequality issues are structural in nature. It would not be wrong to say that women suffer from time poverty. What starts from the preference of a son leads to a cycle of victimization throughout a woman’s life. Some of the atrocities women face include honor-killings, rape, abductions, acid attacks, domestic abuse, harassment, dowry and unequal opportunities in major spheres of life. It is a sad picture to visualize that the deep-rooted misogyny in Pakistan’s societal structure has put us in a place where our country is suffering in its pragmatic spheres of economic, social and political life. To date, few fields of study and occupations are still ghettoized by the concept of gender. It is a norm to see women taking on the responsibility of household and caregiving tasks – an unpaid burden that suffocates many – who want to resist but cannot. The lockdowns highlighted the much invisible work of women. All this is also evident from the Global Gender Gap Index 2020 – which places Pakistan on 151th position out of a total of 153 countries. Economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, and health and survival are the categories of the index where Pakistan ranks among the bottom ten countries. Thus, gender inequality is a plague in our society that can be deemed to be inherited and resistant to progressive changes. Those ‘in-control’ remain insensitive to the muffled cries of many who are victims of heinous injustices and crimes.

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The life of a woman in Pakistan can be summed up as an algorithm of patriarchal restrictions. According to UN Women, in Pakistan, only 40.7% of data is available for indicators to monitor SDGs from a gendered perspective. With all these facts in place, it is significant to determine whether Pakistan’s performance to achieve sustainable development goal number 5 is sufficient to invigorate the achievement of ‘Gender Equality’. Target 5.1 seeks to ‘end all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere’. In this regard, UN Women provides data on ‘legal frameworks that promote, enforce and monitor gender equality (percentage of achievement, 0 – 100)’. There are four relevant areas that cover this indicator – ‘overarching legal frameworks and public life’, which has a level of achievement of 54.5 percent, ’employment and economic benefits’ at 75 percent, ‘marriage and family’ at 46.2 percent, and there is no data on the area of ‘violence against women’ to assign an achievement percentage to it.

Target 5.2 aims at ‘eliminating all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation’. Amidst COVID-19 and subsequent lockdowns, UNFPA projected that for every 3 months of lockdown, 15 million new cases of gender-based violence could be expected. The Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey (2017-18) reports statistics on the proportion of ever-partnered women and girls aged 15 years and older, who were subjected to physical, sexual or psychological violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months. The results showed that 20.6 percent women faced psychological violence, 13.6 percent faced physical violence, and 3.6 percent faced sexual violence. Psychological abuse is prevalent in many areas of the society, but only extreme cases are highlighted or reported. Women don’t have the option to live in any other way because of their socioeconomic dependence on the situation. The spillover effects of domestic abuse are evident in the personality of children – who eventually perform the same roles as members of the next generation. A violence-free life is a basic human right, yet, raising one’s voice against domestic abuse, especially spousal violence, has become a taboo in our society.

Target 5.5 deals with ‘ensuring women’s full and effective participation, and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life’. According to data from the Inter-Parliamentary Union, in 2020, the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments of Pakistan is 20.2 percent, which is a decrease from 22.52 percent in 2012. Moreover, the data from UN Women shows that the proportion of elected seats held by women in deliberative bodies of local government is 17 percent. The Elections Act of 2017 mandated political parties to award five percent of their tickets, on general seats, to women candidates. Unfortunately, our political culture is also tainted with verbal sparring in the form of objectionable and derogatory remarks for women by notable politicians. With regards to this target, another indicator deals with the proportion of women in managerial positions. In 2016, according to the ILOSTAT – Labor Force Survey, this statistic stood at 2.9 percent in Pakistan. Similarly, according to a 2017 report by IMF, there are only 3 percent of female legislators, senior officials and managers in Pakistan against a world average of 29 percent. Contrary to all these statistics about our country, a 2015 report by McKinsey estimated that in a ‘full potential’ scenario – when men and women participate equally in the economy – a resultant 26 percent could be added to annual global GDP by 2025. This leaves much to think in the form of the loss of productivity, and ultimately progress – we as a nation are facing.

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