**So Much for Equality!**

[Huzaima Bukhari](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/huzaima-bukhari/)

October 15, 2022

“The worst form of inequality is to try to make unequal things equal”-Aristotle

Before daring to write upon this particular topic, my humble apology to advocates of feminism, for which I consider myself a strong proponent too but also agree with Timothy Leary when he says: “Women who seek to be equal with men lack ambition”. This probably relates to females vying for an equal position with men despite being blessed with remarkable attributes that men perhaps lack. International Women’s Development Agency (IWDA) proudly claims to exist to advance and protect the rights of diverse women and girls, their vision being gender equality for all. For them, feminism is all about respecting diverse women’s experiences, identities, knowledge and strengths to empower them levelling the playing field between genders and endeavouring to obtain the same opportunities in life available to males.

Gloria Steinmen, an American journalist makes a lot of sense when she aptly summarizes the concept in these words: “A feminist is anyone who recognizes the equality and full humanity of women and men”.

Generally speaking, the idea of feminism and feminist movements, are supposedly quite controversial having different connotations for different people. Something that got a sharp thrust at the turn of the twentieth century still remains a hot topic for discussion, so overwhelmed we are with it. While there cannot be any question about atrocities being suffered by women over the centuries, their desire to attain equality may be a bit lopsided. The woman today aspires fairness in health, education, inheritance, and social and economic positions but especially so when it comes to professional and vocational activities. There is massive case law regarding equal pay, gender discrimination, preferences etc. as well as occasions to celebrate breaking the glass ceiling, proving that women can also set standards few men are able to achieve. This competitive spirit does not appear to decline in the near future and the wave of feminism will certainly surge and ebb as time passes although one wishes that this movement could have been addressed as “humanism” rather than feminism.

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Between this rise and fall, some crucial baffling notions cut across one’s mind.

Is feminism restricted to the urbanites? Are we somehow, overlooking the efforts of a large female population dwelling in rural areas whose lifestyle is far more manly than that of several men in the cities? If the claim of being equal in all aspects of life is so profound and has repeatedly been proven by many, then how come it fails to manifest in some areas whereas in others, there is intense jockeying? Are these ambitions directed towards comfortable positions rather than challenging ones? A cursory look at the prevailing situation may help to uncover this myth of equality in each and every sphere of life without offending the capabilities of women in general and undermining those of men.

On a bright day while touring around the city one comes across lots of construction work being carried out. Buildings, roads, bridges and underpasses are fast coming up. This is essentially a male-dominated sector where women are rarely employed and mostly for the purpose of crushing rocks. One hardly gets to see a woman laying out bricks, making steel frames for reinforcements, or working as a plumber or electrician, nor do we see females clamouring to get into this industry. There can be no qualms about the amount of energy and effort required for these jobs, the discomfort involved and the stamina necessary to bear harsh weather and work for hours on end.

However, equality demands that more and more female workforce should aspire to become construction workers to relieve their male counterparts to some extent. Here too, women will be found mostly working in construction companies’ offices as administrative staff while the better educated may be found as architects and engineers whose primary job is within the confines of a room and occasional visits to construction sites. According to a survey conducted in the USA, “Women compose 9.9 per cent of construction industry trades”. Of course, this would be a much lower figure within our local context. Not that our women lack strength or abilities but somehow, the patriarchal nature of our society would prevent such adventures unless domestic circumstances force them to seek work here. Again, women from rural backgrounds would be more prone towards this unskilled labour compared to the delicate city dwellers even if they are uneducated and belong to the working class.

Mining is another challenging sector which does not appear to have much attraction for women, As per a 2019 International Labour Organization Report 21.4 million workers around the world were engaged in mining and quarrying out of which approximately 8.3 million were men and 3.1 million were women, a number that has remained consistent and low. This is indeed one of the toughest jobs one can imagine but the presence of women means that it is not gender-specific.

Medicine is another field that calls for female attention. In the article, “The missing doctors-An analysis of educated women and female domesticity in Pakistan,” Mariam Mohsin and Jawad Syed write: “While the percentage of female students in medical schools in Pakistan is as high as 80-85 per cent, the percentage of female doctors in the medical workforce remains below 50 per cent.” Although there is tremendous advocacy for female students to pursue medical studies, there is hardly any guarantee that they would actually adopt this profession. Here too, feminist groups have tried to motivate freshly qualified girls to enter the workforce with full commitment but the trend could not be accelerated rendering futile the entire exercise of earning the degree. On a brighter note, paramedical staff, comprising nurses mostly, can be found in large numbers compared to men.

Despite their limitations, women have made considerable inroads into fields earlier dominated by men, which indicates a healthy trend. They can be found in considerable numbers in the legal profession, as veterinarians, commercial and industrial designers, marketing managers, optometrists, sales managers, producers, directors, writers, coaches and chemists.

The world today acknowledges that all women can choose whichever occupation they fancy. “Gender equality is not a women’s issue but should concern and fully engage men as well as women. Equality between women and men is seen both as a human rights issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centered development.” (UN Women)

*The writer, lawyer and author, is an Adjunct Faculty at Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS), member Advisory Board and Senior Visiting Fellow of Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE).*