

Analyzing Women's Property Rights in The Societies of Gilgit-Baltistan: A Feminist Marxist Perspective

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Abstract

The various obstacles to women's property rights i.e. cultural barriers in Gilgit-Baltistan, where patriarchal customs still stop women from inheriting their property right, are examined in this study. Cultural norms (34.4%) are the most common factor limiting women's inheritance, according to the results of interviews that were subjected to analysis in thematic way. These are followed by gendered perceptions of property ownership (19.7%), relationship constraints (16.4%), unequal distribution (11.5%), resource scarcity (8.2%), voluntary renunciation (4.9%), and claims by compulsion (4.9%). The findings show that women mostly accept symbolic shares of property or give up their property right due to fear of social disgrace, economic dependency, and ingrained sort of male entitlement principle. Because of such strong patriarchal beliefs which they have, rights of women continue to be suppressed. By demonstrating how resource scarcity and traditional practices interact to grind down women's legal rights, this study adds literature on women's inheritance in Gilgit-Baltistan. In order to confront the deeply ingrained societal structures that uphold inequality and to encourage a fair access to property rights, the study emphasizes the critical need for focused gender-sensitive policy measures, and legal enforcement mechanisms along with awareness campaigns.

Keywords: Social Disgrace, Patriarchal Beliefs, Voluntary Renunciation

Introduction

Property refers to the rules about who can use, control and can have access to resources and land. When some people have more land than others, then there are debates about that whether the private property is fair or not because there are many cases in which private property give some people full control over land even when other people need it more. Some of the philosophers say that private property is actually a mean that help people grow and live freely and responsibly even if it seems unfair. (Waldron, 2023). International consensus is now well-established about women's right to control property and own it for their economic growth and empowerment. There are certain agreements like CEDAW and many others which support property rights for women. Some countries are also mentioned in which old laws are improved or new laws are made to strengthen women's property rights. In a study of 57 countries all of them recognized the women's property rights in which clear instructions are there about to manage and to own property. (Pawar Alka Gajanan, 2015). Equal rights, including the ability to own property, are guaranteed to men and women in Pakistan under the 1973 Constitution. However, there are many challenges in putting these rules into practice, especially in areas like Gilgit Baltistan where patriarchal traditions are deeply ingrained and women's knowledge of their legal rights is sometimes lacking (Ali, 2017).

Feminist Marxist examination of Gilgit Baltistan shows how economic processes and patriarchal customs interact to restrict women's access to real estate. Because land, a vital resource for generating wealth and social power, is still primarily held by men, women remain economically excluded despite legislative advances. This exclusion is a manifestation of larger economic systems that place a higher priority on men's control over productive resources than it is only a consequence of cultural customs. In Gilgit Baltistan, women's lack of property ownership is therefore a sign of both class exploitation and gender oppression, since they are not given the financial means to resist their subjugation (Deere C. D., 2001). The systemic elimination of women from land ownership is not merely an isolated issue but a manifestation in a clear version of established socio-economic disparities. In those societies of Gilgit-Baltistan, where traditional customs are more prominent than implementation of and legal frameworks, this often work in reinforcing male control over land, limiting access of women to economic resources and their rights. The patriarchal structure prevalent in the region creates a cycle of dependency, where women depend on male family members mostly for livelihood and sustenance. This reliance is provoked by insufficient awareness of their legal rights and the lack of effective enforcement mechanisms to protect those rights which are necessary to be given for a good society. Furthermore, time demands and highlight the necessity for comprehensive policy reforms that address both legal and cultural barriers. By finding and appropriate recognition of land ownership as a critical factor in women's empowerment, these efforts can help dismantle the socio-economic structures that perpetuate grievances among women and enable them to gain financial independence and social agency. Women's property rights have particular chances and problems in Gilgit Baltistan, a remote and mountainous area in northern Pakistan. Social and economic connections are governed by strong tribal and patriarchal traditions in this culturally diverse region. Due to customs that favor male heirs, women in Gilgit Baltistan are banned from owning land, and whatever land or property that they do receive is frequently passed on to their male relatives informally (Hussain, 2016). The hurdles in any form faced by women in saving their property rights in Gilgit-Baltistan are actually compounded by a lack of effective legal frameworks and implementation of it. The success of such initiatives hinges on overcoming deeply rooted cultural norms that resist change. Legislative measures are urgently needed to ensure women's rights are recognized and protected, as shown by recent calls for immediate reforms to empower women in the region (Dawn, 2023). In view of Gilgit Baltistan's socioeconomic structure, which is centered on agricultural and land-based prosperity, property ownership is even more important for economic empowerment. In addition to offering financial stability, property ownership is a sign of social and political power in the neighborhood. Given this, women's lack of property rights frequently prevents them from fully engaging in the economic and social life of their communities, further solidifying their marginalization (Mohyuddin, 2013). The systemic elimination of women from land ownership is not merely an isolated issue but a manifestation in a clear version of established socio-economic disparities. In those societies of Gilgit-Baltistan, where traditional customs are more prominent than implementation of and legal frameworks, this often work in reinforcing male control over land, limiting access of women to economic resources and their rights. The patriarchal structure prevalent in the region creates a cycle of dependency, where women depend on male family members mostly for livelihood and sustenance. This reliance is provoked by insufficient awareness of their legal rights and the lack of effective enforcement mechanisms to protect those rights which are necessary to be given for a good society. Furthermore, time demands and highlight the necessity for comprehensive policy reforms that address both legal and cultural barriers. By finding and appropriate recognition of land ownership as a critical factor in women's empowerment, these efforts can help dismantle the socio-economic structures that perpetuate grievances among women and enable them to gain financial independence and social agency. Women's property rights have particular chances and problems in Gilgit Baltistan, a remote and mountainous area in northern Pakistan. Social and economic

connections are governed by strong tribal and patriarchal traditions in this culturally diverse region. Due to customs that favor male heirs, women in Gilgit Baltistan are banned from owning land, and whatever land or property that they do receive is frequently passed on to their male relatives informally (Hussain, 2016). Countless studies are present in which there are many challenges being discuss which a women face while managing or owning her immovable property. Barriers are of different type like cultural, gender bias or unfair inheritance makes it harder for women to own her property right. Studies use samplings and mix method approach to study inheritance rights in Haripur region in which interviews give very deep insights and on the other hand 80 household surveys cover the issues of ownership. Community members and experts of family also share their insights and honest views for full picture (Bibi et al., 2024).

Materials and Methods

Study Area

Three divisions of Gilgit Baltistan, Gilgit, Baltistan and Diamer were sites of this study.

Gilgit Division

Gilgit division which comprises the districts of Gilgit, Hunza, Nagar and Ghizer is Located in the center of Gilgit Baltistan at roughly 36°N, 74°E (Siddiqui & Akbar, 2019). There are many people in the division who live in both urban areas as well as in rural areas. The administrative and commercial center of this division is Gilgit City. The region is characterized by its rugged Landscape traversed by significant rivers like the Gilgit and Hunza Rivers. The livelihoods are mostly centered on small scale agriculture, government work, trade and tourism.

Baltistan Division

Baltistan division is situated between 35°N and 36°N and 75°E and 77°E In the eastern part of Gilgit Baltistan (Ali,2021.). there are different vital districts like Skardu, Shigar, Kharmang, Ganche and Rundo, make up Baltistan. There are roughly 700,000 people living in the division who are dispersed over many towns and villages (GoGB, 2022). Many of the communities of Baltistan are located over 2500 meters creating a distinctive high altitude plateau setting. The area is well known for its chilly desert landscape.

Diamer Division

The districts of Diamer, Astore and Darel-Tangir Make up the Diamer Division, which is located in the southwest of Gilgit Baltistan, Mainly around approximately 35°N, 73°E (Khan, 2020). Communities in the valleys of Foothills of the western Himalayas make up the division's estimate, 500,000 inhabitants. Diamer Division's infrastructure development and literacy indexes are lower than those of the comparatively better developed northern regions.



Figure 3.1: Map of Gilgit Baltistan

Research Design

Research design provides a structured framework for interpreting data, its collection and analyzing. Qualitative design was chosen which delve into how rights of property are experienced and understood in different cultural settings. This method allows the researcher to gain deep understanding by open-ended interviews having the analysis of relevant documents and observations. The focus was on various factors like cultural norms, gender roles and personal experiences that shape the property rights for the women's in the different societies of Gilgit Baltistan.

Results

The analysis of the data reveals that cultural norms were the most influential factor in shaping women's property rights across Gilgit-Baltistan, accounting for 34.4 percent of the responses. These norms, deeply rooted in patriarchal traditions, showed the strongest presence in all three divisions, indicating how persistently male-preference inheritance practices dominate. The second most significant factor was the perception of gender in property ownership, which contributed 19.7 percent to the overall findings, reflecting how entrenched ideas of male entitlement still dictate inheritance patterns. Relationship constraints followed with 16.4 percent, pointing to the fear of losing family respect or social standing when women assert their rights. Unequal distribution was reported in 11.5 percent of the cases, highlighting how symbolic or partial allocations are often used in place of equal shares. Resource scarcity (8.2 percent) also played a role, where limited land availability led families to prioritize male heirs. Finally, voluntary renunciation and claims made under compulsion, both at 4.9 percent each, represented the least reported factors, suggesting that while some women willingly give up their rights for family harmony, others only claim their inheritance under severe financial stress. Together, these patterns underscore how social, cultural, and economic pressures collectively contribute to women's marginal access to property rights in the region. From perspective of feminist Marxist theory, the point which is being cleared is that women's exclusion from property ownership within the different societies of Gilgit Baltistan is not only a cultural issue but in actual, it is the manifestation of the structural inequalities that arise due to patriarchy. Better explanation is given through this theory which says that women's lack of control over land and other resources of women in most of the societies keep them dependent on men. Now what happens is this always benefits those systems having patriarchal attributes. In this way man gets more power of control and gender believes along with the cultural traditions become more influential tools that makes ownership of property unquestionable and seems natural for male ownership. In both cases, either woman remains silent out of fear of being judge by family or giving up inheritance right willingly, woman doesn't truly make a choice that can be considered free. It is because they are actually following those social pressures which are shaped by male dominance and years of inequality. Result of such practices comes in the form of women accepting their positions inferior to men in society and family both even it goes against their own interests. Within the different societies of Gilgit Baltistan, patterns of seeing men as rightful heirs, giving symbolic portions or a small part to women while property division is seen clearly. This is a wider system having such practices where access to property or a decision to make by women is limited by male class and gender perceptions. This cause woman to remain dependent and weak economically while elite groups continue to control most of the resources. So from a point of feminist Marxist theory, transformation is demanded both things. 1st, in economic system that values profit over equality and 2nd, in cultural mindset that keeps men above women for true empowerment.

Discussion

The issue of women's property rights in Gilgit-Baltistan is deeply shaped by cultural traditions, social stigma, economic constraints, and entrenched gender perceptions. Patriarchal norms favoring sons over daughters continue to dominate inheritance practices, with Jirgas and family elders reinforcing the male entitlement to property. Women often face social stigma and relationship constraints, where the fear of losing dignity or disrupting family harmony compels them to surrender their rightful shares. Resource scarcity further exacerbates this inequality, as families prioritize male heirs in times of limited land or economic hardship. Even when women are granted inheritance, it is frequently symbolic or unequal, leaving them with token assets while men inherit larger and more valuable property. At the same time, many women voluntarily relinquish their rights, viewing it as an expression of loyalty, family cohesion, or dependence on male relatives for financial support. However, economic hardship sometimes pushes women to claim their rights, especially when faced with poverty or lack of alternatives, although such claims often come at the cost of social disapproval. Underlying all these factors is the persistent gendered perception that property ownership belongs to men, with women considered secondary, dependent, and undeserving of equal ownership. These intersecting cultural, social, and economic dimensions' highlight how women's property rights are systematically constrained in the region, reinforcing gender inequality across generations. The point to note is that the things that worsen the situation are social stigma and emotional pressure because the woman who tried to claim their property rights are often labeled as disrespectful or disobedient. This discourage them from asserting their inheritance rights. Fear of relationship damage or losing a family honor forces many women to remain silent because there are societies where harmony is highly valued and women's such sort of conception of loyalty keep their reputation. Such burdens either socially or emotionally continues quietly as women themselves become the part of such systems that denies them equality. Moreover, a critical factor that plays important role is economic condition. Financial instability and land scarcity make families to prioritize male hires. this is due to the belief that sons will carry the family's financial responsibilities and play role for protecting the assets. Even when if in case a woman receives a share then in such cases it's often symbolic, small or it unequal. A condition is also there when women voluntarily renounce their rights due to the belief that this strengthens family ties and they consider themselves dependent on male relatives or family support.

However, when unfortunate time of widowhood or economic crisis came upon women, some of them claim their property right out of necessity but sadly such actions lead to criticism, loss of respect and family conflict. That's why these patterns show that issues of access to property is deeply rooted in those useless cultural or social beliefs which defines ownership as only male privilege. Suffering is seen in the form of limiting women's access to property and reinforcement of gender inequality from one generation to the next.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of this study reveal that the denial of women's property rights in Gilgit-Baltistan is largely rooted in entrenched patriarchal values, cultural traditions, and societal pressures that favor men as primary inheritors while confining women to the domestic sphere. The seven identified reasons ranging from cultural norms and fear of losing dignity to resource scarcity and gendered perceptions of ownership highlight how women's rights are systematically undermined, often with women themselves surrendering their claims to preserve family harmony. Even when granted inheritance, it is usually unequal or symbolic, while genuine claims are often made only in times of financial hardship, underscoring the conditional nature of women's empowerment. Feminist Marxism explain this by saying that deeper economic systems based on patriarchy work to control woman's thoughts and making them reliant on male family members for survival give them no

choice but to surrender their basic right. As it convinces woman to stay dependent on men involuntary renunciation of right is not made through genuine choice but is an outcome of a structural control. Moreover, women's own responses to such pressures where their basic rights are denied show how inequality is sustained from within the family itself. Most of the women's view the sacrifice of surrendering their inheritance right as a way to maintain peace and an act of loyalty to their families. It is because the situation becomes bad when a women claims property so it brings disturbance in family's harmony. Even the share a woman receives in rare cases is symbolic that doesn't ensure true economic empowerment which a real valuable property part does so. The worth mentioning point to note here is that empowerment of women also remains fragile and conditional because they attempt to claim their rightful inheritance right only in the time of hardship or widowhood. This is a sort of dependency which limits Women's ability to achieve long term stability and this finally reinforces their secondary position in community and family both. After addressing this, what it calls for is, a comprehensive social transformation because establishing community based support awareness campaigns can make women to learn about their rights and powerful assistance mechanism to claim them. Fruitful step should be, reshaping those traditional interpretations that restrict women's inheritance rights. These sort of efforts can challenge deep seated patriarchal narratives and contribute for cultural transformation with fair property distribution within the different societies of Gilgit Baltistan. To reduce barriers, the study recommends awareness programs, support mechanisms and dialogue involving community leaders to challenge patriarchal narratives; economic initiatives to reduce women's dependency; reforms ensuring fair distribution; and educational measures to instill gender equality in inheritance, promoting long-term cultural transformation.

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