

**GENDER VIOLENCE AND GENDER CONFIGURATION IN KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA**Sheraz Ali¹, Maryam Imad², Muhammad Asghar Khan³, Shahid Khan⁴

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Abstract

This research study is a secondary review that focuses on gender violence and gender configuration in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, gender violence is entirely culture-centric and this problem breeds from the patriarchal mentality. Since, the decision-making power in the family is vested in man, therefore, neglect of women's share in inheritance and compromise on their participation in education and jobs is very common. Denial of women's share in inheritance makes them economically more vulnerable and dependent on men. This dependency breeds many problems for women, particularly domestic violence which results in depression, chronic stress, suicidal ideation, social seclusion etcetera. Man has power to control and occupy property, land and labour while woman does not have such power to occupy property. Women's fate is usually decided by man, either by her brother, father or husband, while women wage for justice for years and years but remain in vain. The only solution to the problem of gender violence is to follow and practice the Islamic laws of inheritance in true spirit to make women economically independent and powerful.

Key Words: Gender Violence, Gender Configuration, Patriarchal Structure, Inheritance Rights

Introduction

The proud land of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, popularly known as the Land of Hospitality, has witnessed the mightiest of civilizations, namely Gandahara and Hindushahi and has served as a corridor for countless invaders and conquerors (Annual Status of Educational Report, 2011). For centuries, Sufi poets (classical poets), scholars and intellectuals propagated the message of love and peace in this area, however, this land still suffers from internal chaos and riot. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is one of the five Provinces of Pakistan, located in the northwest of the country. It shares its borders with Afghanistan in the northwest and has direct land route connection through Gilgit-Baltistan Province with Peoples Republic of China in the north. On the west and south is

the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), Azad Kashmir in the east, Punjab and the Islamabad Capital Territory in the southeast. The Province of Baluchistan is located southwards. The Province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has an area of 74,521 km² with the population of about 22 million (Annual Status of Educational Report, 2011). Khyber Pakhtunkhwa consists of 25 Districts, comprising 17 Settled Area Districts and 8 Provincially Administered Tribal Area (PATA) Districts. The Provincial capital and the largest city of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is Peshawar. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, has been one of the hot spots, in terms of violence against women. This huge violence against women accounts for the widened gap between male-female literacy rate, economic power and political participation. According to Population Welfare Department Report (2008), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa consists of 13.18% of the total population of Pakistan. The total population of the province is 19.63 million, in which 52% are males and 48% are females. Male literacy rate is 51% and female literacy rate is 18.82%. More than 83% of the total population live in rural parts of the province where majority of the people are dependent on subsistence farming. Pakhtuns are the native people comprising two-thirds of the total population of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Other groups in the province include Awan, Chitrali, Kohistani, Gujjar and Hazaras. These groups are not the descendants from Pakhtun tribe. Among other Pakhtun groups, there are Afghan refugees. Afghan refugees consist of Pakhtuns and Persians. Majority of the local people in the province are bilingual. Pashto and Urdu are the two popular languages, spoken in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Some of the details of the status of women and violence against them, in the context of local environment, are given in the following passage.

Table-1.2 shows details of violence against women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Nature of	Number of Cases	Percentage
Murder	328	50.46
Domestic violence	89	13.69
Abduction/ Kidnapping	77	11.85
Suicide	54	8.30
Honour killing	22	3.38
Rape / Gang rape	5	0.76
Stove burning	3	0.46
Acid throwing	1	0.15
Miscellaneous	71	10.92
Total	650	

Source: Aurat Foundation Annual Report 2010

In the above table, reported cases of violence against women are given in which murders of women constitute more than 50 percent of the total crimes. These murders do not include killings of women for honour which has been one of the biggest atrocities, taking place in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. There were 22 cases of honour killings which constitute more than 3 percent of the total crimes. Of these cases, 5 incidences of rape took place during 2010 but these were only those rape cases, which were reported and the victims were rescued from the brutal clutches of their family members and the perpetrators. It is a common practice in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa that most often sexual violence cases are not reported and even if in some incidences, cases are

reported but no information is registered against anyone in the police station. Cases in which no FIR's are registered, the victim or both are killed somewhere. In most of sexual abuse cases, the woman is prioritized in killing to restore family's honour. It does not matter, whether physical contact was consensual or non-consensual, in both the cases the victim is targeted. In honour killings, neither police nor society can interfere because a woman is considered as the property of man either husband, brother or father and usually the decision of killing her is taken by either of them. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, a woman is never murdered, unless she is sexually abused. Sexual abuse could either be in the form of elopement with a boy, sexual intercourse without marriage or extra-marital affairs, illicit relationship, either consensual or non-consensual or rape. In all these cases, woman's honour is black spotted. Once the honour of a woman is black spotted, her life pays the price for the mistake committed.

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, a common code, called *namus* in local language, is used for the honour of woman. *Namus* is called woman pride or the Pakhtun pride. Even a minor mistake or a slight molestation of woman is rendered as a huge offence. In Pashto language, a common word 'tor' is used which is called a stigma or black or black spot. A woman when carries out illicit or extra-marital relationship with another male, is associated with the word 'tor' or black spotted. With the stigmatization of the woman, the whole of her family is known with shame or stigma (tor). In this regard, the black spot is not only imposed on the woman who is sexually abused but also on the family, she belongs to. Usually, a family when confronted with such situation, pays the price in the form of killing the woman to cleanse the black spot. This conservative behavior of Pakhtuns inflicts great scourge to the society collectively where women are always on the ledge of loss.

Masculinity and power are the interrelated human characteristics which show manhood (Hearn, 1998). These characteristics are regulated by man-to-man and man-to-woman relationship. Man's aggression and violence shows and generates his masculinity and power. Man's violence against woman is one of the primary areas which adds more to his power and masculinity. Man's masculinity and power are shown through his ability to dominate and control (Hearn and Whitehead, 2006). For dominancy and control, violence is a rational and conscious act (Pringle, 1995), associated with many socio-economic and cultural factors. Among these factors, family structure, norms legitimizing violence, personal and social construct and structural and ideological reasons are dominant (Hearn, 1998).

Since the social structure in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is patriarchal, therefore, men predominantly occupy spaces of familial and social relationship. In order to occupy these spaces, violence is the primary tool to use. Hearn (1998) argues that occupying spaces shows man dominancy and to maintain this dominancy, violence against woman must be put into effect. This practice of man, carrying violence against woman, is a strong cultural factor, derived from the patriarchal social structure (Dobash and Dobash, 1979). It means that violence against woman is more a cultural factor. Usually, man carries out violence against woman when he perceives that woman violates her patriarchally ordained role which means challenging the patriarchal structure (Dobash and Dobash, 1979; Yllo and Bograd, 1988; Smith, 1990; Haj-Yahia, 2003; Niaz, 2003). In this regard, comparatively woman faces more troubles in the patriarchal system than in nonpatriarchal social structure. In the patriarchal social structure, her behavior is strictly regulated through patriarchal norms, violation of which results in violence.

According to Smith (1990), patriarchal mentality develops in societies plagued by ignorance. Ignorance brings them closer to patriarchy. Those men who are ignorant, rely more on the

patriarch for social and economic support. Smith (1990) argues that people with less education, low level of income and low living standard, associate themselves with patriarchy because from the patriarchal social structure they receive more power, in comparison to woman. These patriarchal attitudes differentiate people and specify their roles. This allocation and assigning of roles on the basis of gender, create more problems for woman. Therefore, woman in the patriarchal social structure, suffers the most. Hearn (1998) argues that in patriarchal social structure, higher gender differentiation causes more harm to woman and results in violence against her. On the other hand, societies with less gender differentiation are less likely to cause harm to woman. In Pakhtun society, one of the main causes of violence against woman is the higher level of gender differentiation, structured in patriarchy. Patriarchal mentality with higher gender differentiation, contributes more to violence against woman for the sake of maintaining man dominancy and power.

Gender Configuration in Pakhtun Society

In Pakhtun society woman is confined to the four walls of the house who dominates the domestic sphere while man dominates public spaces and holds control of property, land and businesses (Ahmed, 1980; Boesen, 1983; Shaheen, 2004; Minallah, 2009). In theory, there is a proper demarcation between domestic and public spaces but in practice both the spheres are dominated by man. Dominancy of man is obvious from the power he exercises in controlling social and familial affairs. In decision making, woman's consent is given no heed. All the familial and social affairs are decided by men. Man has power to control and occupy property, land and labour while woman does not have such power to occupy property. In inheritance, woman's share is usually neglected. Woman fate is usually decided by man, either by her brother, father or husband. Even woman does not choose her life partner on her will. She does not act on her will in major decision making rather she obeys the decisions taken by a man.

In Pakhtun society, male pre-dominancy is a process which starts at birth. The birth of a male child is celebrated with pomp and show while the birth of a female child is considered as a liability (Faery and Noor, 2004). This practice of celebration means more value to male child and less or no value to female child. It is not only the celebration of his birth, rather every moment of his growth is valued, particularly when the child stands on his feet and walks. On the occasion of his circumcision, there is even greater gathering of people and celebration than it was on his birth. These momentous celebrations of male child in the family add more power and value to his role (Fikree and Pasha, 2004). This addition of more value and power to male child in the family is due to his role as a protector of the family. The son ensures security and strength to family while the daughter recedes family power in the form of an infliction to family's strength and inheritance. In this regard, the male child is provided every opportunity of proper growth and nourishment, particularly education, health and recreation while such opportunities are neglected for female children. This differentiation between male and female child widens gender gap at the very early stages of their growth. This gap then results in gender discrimination.

The local cultural pattern in Pakhtun society develops a mindset, inculcated with certain cultural values which favor men and disfavor women. Woman is taught from her early age of childhood to be submissive and obedient while man is trained to be more muscular and powerful. This practice is due to the socio-economic significance of man and socio-economic insignificance of woman. This practice is enforced through a long socialization process with a more cyclical pattern (Farooqi, 1992; Faery and Noor, 2004; Khan and Hussain, 2008) which foster such

unequal power relationship. The pathway, specified for a female child, in Pakhtun society is quite different than the pathway specified for a male child. This specification of their lines of actions is through transmission of certain cultural values in their minds (Faery and Noor, 2004). The way a female is taught and trained she acts in her family in the same way. A woman always prefers, whatever is given value by her family. Family's honour, recognition and appreciation are given commitment and devotion. Sacrificing her will to the will of her family is the essence of the indoctrination process.

Individual Freedom in Pakhtun Social Setup

One of the significant features of Pakhtun society is joint family system, primarily based on patriarchal and patrilineal values (Barth, 1959; Ahmed, 1980; Shaheen, 2004). In a joint family system, age and gender are the common distinctive features which make an individual either more or less authoritative. A joint family system is headed by the patriarch who is more experienced and aged. The power to decide and control is vested in the patriarch. The authority of the patriarch is never breached by the family members, both men and women. Those who disobey the authority of the patriarch, are punished by the patriarch. The punishment is usually in the form of exit from the family or ex-communication. The female members of the family rarely breach the discipline of the family but male members usually commit such mistakes. The female members of the family are considered as the honour of the family; therefore, their minute trespassing behavior is also rendered as a breach of discipline. The punishment for the females is severe than the punishment for the male members of the family. All the affairs of the family are decided by the patriarch. The male members of the family have the right to give consent only. They do not have the power to impose their consent on the patriarch or influence him or his decision. The economic affairs of the family are carried out and complemented through mutual funds. All the family expenses, including food, clothing, security, education, health, marriages and deaths are remunerated from the mutual fund. All the male members of the family provide finances to the mutual fund of the family. Female members are exempted from contributing to mutual funds. In joint family, male members have complete freedom of expression, movement and possessing property but female members of the family do not have such freedom. Female members do not possess property or land, except whatever is given to them in the dowry or inheritance. This discrimination extends to other areas of family affairs, particularly education and jobs or income earning opportunities. This social setup in Pakhtun society expands male domain of authority and role and infringes on female's role and contribution.

However, the rising trends in globalization and modernization have, up to a greater extent, affected this social setup. People, particularly from educated families now prefer separate connubial life. Nuclear family set up is operative in urban areas. Those who suffered in the joint family setup, particularly women, now resisting and challenging the traditional social setup. Women in cities avail educational and income earning opportunities which positively affect their living standard. But despite of the huge influx of people into the nuclear family setup, jobs, education and health, still a huge population in rural areas are spending life in the traditional setup where women have little choices and freedom. In such traditional setups, women do not have any other options but to bow down to the authority of men (Minallah, 2003; Shaheen, 2004).

Women Subordination in Pakhtun Society

No society in the world is free from human categorization. These categories specify human roles and statuses. These categories favor one group more than the other. Gender is the most rudimentary and prominent category of human life, encompassing both biological and inherited traits (Cynthia, 2007). Human identification is basically determined by gender because it is premised on human biological characteristic. Sex is part of gender and it is a biological characteristic that determines human identification and life. Gender has a major impact on human life because the quality of life, an individual's relationship, socialization, social status and social role are all determined by this category. In every society, gap between two individuals is either narrowed or widened on the basis of this category. Human categorization based on gender has both negative and positive impacts on human life (Cynthia, 2007) and every society seeks to escape the negative impacts but in fact no social status is free from this human category.

The conceptual divides are always symbolic in nature but determine physical boundaries when these concepts are translated into practices (Lamont & Virag, 2002). These concepts are usually translated into practices by the cultural entrepreneurs (Swedberg, 2006) involving both personal construct theory and social construct theory (Henry, 2009). Personal construct theory argues that the driving agent of attributed reality is personal cognitive force depending on an individual ability to construct and differentiate standards and sub-standards. Social construct theory views reality as a symbolic social process involving routine human interaction. Religious and political leaders, social organizations and institutions, judges in the courtrooms, players in the playground, hunters on the game path, people in the streets and inside the four walls, are all driving agents of cultural entrepreneurs.

Similarly, in Pakhtun society, this human categorization favors men more than women. Women are always considered as subordinates to men. Masculinity, power, authority and control are all characteristics of men – the over-ordinates. This distinction between men and women is enforced through a long historical and cultural process. Women in this process are always on the weaker end, particularly in their familial and social relationship and political and economic participation. In comparison to men, women are always placed in the lower rank. This relegating process is so strong in Pakhtun society because it has its roots linked with the very primary institution – the family – where women are trained to behave as women and remain subordinates to men. Since, the power relationship is dominated by men, therefore, men transcend every sphere of life and women adapt to the space and standard, they are given. This behavior plays an important role in maintaining the status quo of biased gendered ideology.

Conclusion

Gender violence is almost everywhere in the world and every society is plagued by such discriminatory practices. Even the developed world is also witnessing this problem, however, the nature of violence is different in the developing world than in the developed world. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the nature of gender violence is entirely culture-centric and the configuration of gender is totally different than the configuration of women in the developed world. In Pakhtun social setup, whatever atrocities are carried out against women are caused by two cultural practices; one is neglect of women's share in inheritance and the other one is compromise on their participation in education and jobs. Poor economic conditions of women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are the result of denial of their share in inheritance. Since, the local social setup is entirely patriarchal and all familial decisions are taken by men not women, therefore, their

participation in education and jobs is compromised on, which make them and their descendants suffer constantly. Women subordination is basically indoctrinated through traditional practices of gender configuration and deprivation from inheritance. Economic dependency in women is not genetical rather it is a social problem and it breeds many problems for them; including poverty, familial disputes, domestic violence and discrimination. Such problems get further aggravated in some rural areas where the culture of honour killing, brides selling and exchange prevails. These problems are culture-centric and can be eradicated by following the Islamic laws of inheritance and relationship in true spirit.

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