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**AN APPRAISAL OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF
WOMEN: PRACTICES AND PROSPECTS IN PAKISTAN**

Bushra Bannian¹ , Dr. Sardar M.A. Waqar Khan Arif² , Professor Dr. Muhammad Mahroof Khan³

¹Lecturer of Law, Department of Law, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Kotli, Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Pakistan.

²Assistant Professor of Law, Department of Law, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Kotli, Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Pakistan.

³Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Kotli, Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Pakistan.

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ABSTRACT

Objective of the Study: This article aims to discuss socio-economic empowerment of women in Pakistan. It highlights relevant laws in Pakistan and discusses contemporary practices from the perspective of Pakistan. As women are vulnerable in society at large therefore this article addresses social and economic empowerment of women in Pakistan.

Research Methodology: In this article, qualitative method of research will be followed up and data from books, articles, reports and technological sources will be used and analysed.

Findings of the Study: Socio-economic empowerment of women in Pakistan needs special attention by Government and institutions. The Government is required to legislate and implement effectively for progressive realization of rights of women. Promotion and protection of basic human rights is essential for women's empowerment and development.

Implications of the Study: In this article, the importance of socio-economic empowerment in Country are discussed and certain practices/issues are highlighted which are prevailing in Pakistan. This study will help law making institutions and policy makers to identify challenges for socio-economic empowerment of women and to overcome these issues.

I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of women development is recognised globally as a key step to certify prosperity of territory. Islam has presented exemplary model to safeguard the interests of women and to ensure their wellbeing. Principles of Islam are based on rules of fairness and justice to ensure genuine equality between male and female. Pakistan being an Islamic Republic recognises the status of women as enriched in Islam and is making continuous efforts to safeguard their rights and to ensure their empowerment. Government has thus enforced several laws and executed numerous policies to ensure and improve social, political and economic wellbeing of women. However, the condition of women in Pakistan is anything but satisfactory. They are exposed to all kinds of vulnerabilities and violence. Hence it can be concluded that while the legislation and governmental policies are primary to safeguard interests of individuals, the execution of these laws and strategies is equally important to achieve the desired goal. This paper is an effort to analyse the condition of women in Pakistan. It gives a brief view of concept of women socio-economic rights and equality in Islam, and highlights the challenges faced by Pakistani women.

II. AN APPRAISAL OF WOMEN RIGHTS IN PAKISTAN

The history of Pakistan's independence is incomplete without the exemplary role and struggles of women in it. With the passage of time their efforts continued to increase towards the development of country and hence the legal protections to enable and encourage them to contribute in this regard also kept growing. However, beside the decade long struggle to empower women and their unprecedented contribution in progress of country they still remain vulnerable and are highly exposed to discrimination and abuse in every aspect of life. While the protection of their right by state legislation is considered primary, the poor implementation mechanism and cultural barriers restrict the safeguard of rights and interests of women guaranteed to them by religion and laws of country subsequently. Below is the brief view of national and international commitments of Pakistan, through decades, to protect and empower women.

Constitutional Protection of Women's Rights

The Constitution of Islamic republic of Pakistan begins with preamble that ensures the state laws to be in full conformity with the ideology of Islam. Thus, every law is drafted and interpreted in light of teachings and principles of Islam. Hence Article 8-28 of Constitution of Pakistan, 1973 establish fundamental rights and extends it to women on the basis of equality, fairness and justice

as enriched in Islam. This thus certifies that every individual is entitled to exercise these fundamental freedoms without any discrimination on any grounds whatsoever. The list of rights includes right to education, equality before law, freedom to speech, right to information, safeguard to privacy, dignity and reputation, prohibition of slavery and forced labour, property rights, religious freedom, right to life, liberty etc. Moreover, this notion is further strengthened under principles of policy (Constitution, 1973 arts. 32, 34,35, 37(e), 38(a), 38(d)) as provided in constitution to ensure active participation and full protection of women.

Federal and provincial legislation on socio-economic empowerment of women

It is interesting to notice that over the course of time Pakistan has made certain progress in terms of formulating laws that ensure and encourage women empowerment. After 18th amendment of 2010 along with other important subjects' greater autonomy has been given to provinces with respect to matters relevant to women development (Bhattacharya, 2014). In line with laws, the National Plan of Action for Women initiated in 1998 is seen as the most awaited initiative by the government towards the development of women followed by Pakistan National Commission on The Status of Women (2000) and National Policy on the Development and Empowerment of Women in 2002 (Official Website of Punjab Commission on status of Women). Furthermore, provinces in Pakistan have also established commissions and development departments to monitor and enhance the empowerment of women. In this regard the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was pioneer to establish such commission with the name of "The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Commission on the Status of Women"(Official website KP Commission on status of Women). Similarly, the initiatives like establishment of "Ministry of Women Development (MOWD) at the Federal level and the Women Development Departments at the four provinces" have also been working actively towards safeguard of women's rights (Official website of Government of Sindh on rights of Women).

III. SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

The Right to Education

Undisputedly, education is the prime and key step to development. The idea of equality, peace, justice, rule of law, fundamental freedoms and development of society is impossible without education. Hence keeping it view its utmost importance Islam has declared the act of seeking education not only a right but also a duty to every Muslim. The first Verse revealed on Messenger of Allah (SAW) start with "Iqra" that means "read". Messenger of Allah (SAW) stressed on importance of education saying: "Seeking Knowledge is a duty of every Muslim, man or woman" (Al- Tirmidhi: 218), (Mustafa, 2017).

The Rights in Family affairs

Islam gave high status to women and offers huge respect to her choice. In marriage the consent of a woman got same importance as the consent of a man, Hazrat Khajida(RA) the first wife of Prophet (SAW) sent the offer to marriage for Prophet (SAW) (Azid, 2020). Moreover, in socially empowering the women in family affairs Islam has not only given her right to express her choice for marriage but has also forwarded the concept of Khulla by the virtue of which wife is entitled to seek termination of marriage, in which she is not happy. Similarly, while granting her the duties of upbringing the children and to take care of her husband's affairs, Islam has directed men to remain polite, kind and generous toward the women (Mustafa, 2017).

Role of women in social-wellbeing and protection of their social-status

This is an undisputed fact that without effective contribution of women no advancement in society is possible, this requires their efficient involvement both in household and at workplace. Islam has presented brilliant mechanism to assure right balance between rights and duties of men and women. For this Islam has ensured genuine equality between their rights and duties. Islam has thus developed excellent principles for constructive development of society.

Allah says in Quran “The Believers, men and women, are protectors one of another: they enjoin what is just and forbid what is evil: they observe regular prayers, practise regular charity, and obey Allah and His Messenger....” (Surah at Tawbah Verse 71).

This verse shows that both men and women have equal obligation towards the betterment of society according to the commands of Almighty. Hence Islam rewards them both equally for their good deeds.

Islam extends equal protection and dignity for men and women. Allah says in Quran “if anyone slew a person unless it be for murder or for spreading mischief in the land it would be as if he slew the whole people...” (5:32). Similarly, the legal system in Islam considers them equal before the eye of law and enforces equal liability for their action, both have equal right with respect to privacy, seek education, safeguard to reputation and social status, protection of dignity, and security of assets, etc.

Islam has put equal responsibility on men and women to ensure the social-wellbeing of community at large, Prophet (SAW) said “In their mutual affection, compassion and sympathy, the believers are like one body: when any of its organs has a complaint, the rest of the body responds with sleeplessness and fever.” Hence the social structure established by Islam emphasis on role of men and women and stresses them both to be mindful, kind, and supportive in their dealings (Al-Khayat, 2003).

In further explaining the role of individuals toward the well-fare of state, Prophet (SAW) said “None of you attains truly to faith unless he loves for his brother/sister whatever good he loves to have himself.” This direction of Messenger of Allah (SAW) urges both men and women to be concerned and sympathetic in their relations with each other (Al-Khayat, 2003).

Women’s participation in Social Policing

The principles of Islam inspire the role of women in national wellbeing and harmony. During the era of Prophet (SAW) and afterwards Muslim women made exemplary contributions in civil, political and military fields along with men, of course within the directions prescribed by Islam for them both. Islam highly respects the sound opinion of women in every matter related to personal and professional life. Hence it uplifts the efforts of women to utilize their talent to make effective contribution for benefit of religion and nation.

Quran discloses the incidents of women Ruler Queen (of Sheba) and draws special focus towards her behaviour in consulting others before making any decision on important matters, and her conduct toward recognising the righteous religion Islam.(Elius, 2011).

During the leadership of Prophet (SAW) there was principle of taking pledge from the individuals as to certify their support and commitment towards the interests of state. Hence faithfulness and loyalty were given to him by men and women both.(Bhattacharya, 2014).

Moreover, Muslim women made profound contributions in battles and have proved their skills and got appreciation in Islam for their conduct. Umm-e Atyqah(RA) needs a special mentioning here who accompanied the Prophet (SAW) in seven battles. Hazrat “Wairyh” the sister of Muawia, led a contingent of women in the battle of Yarmuk” (Elius, 2011).

Hazrat Ayesha (RA) (the wife of the Prophet (SAW)) was famous for her scholarly contribution in Islamic jurisprudence. She played a central role in development and understanding of Islamic jurisprudence. After the death of Prophet(SAW), his companions(RA) were used to consult Hazrat Ayesha(RA) to seek her guidance on various issues. She has unprecedented contribution especially in field of Islamic law, jurisprudence and theology (Azid, 2020). Alongwith Women’s participation in social policing the employment rate 2021 is as follows:

Figure 01: Percentage change in employment by sex, 2006-2021 and employment rate, 2021



Source: ILO calculations based on ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates.

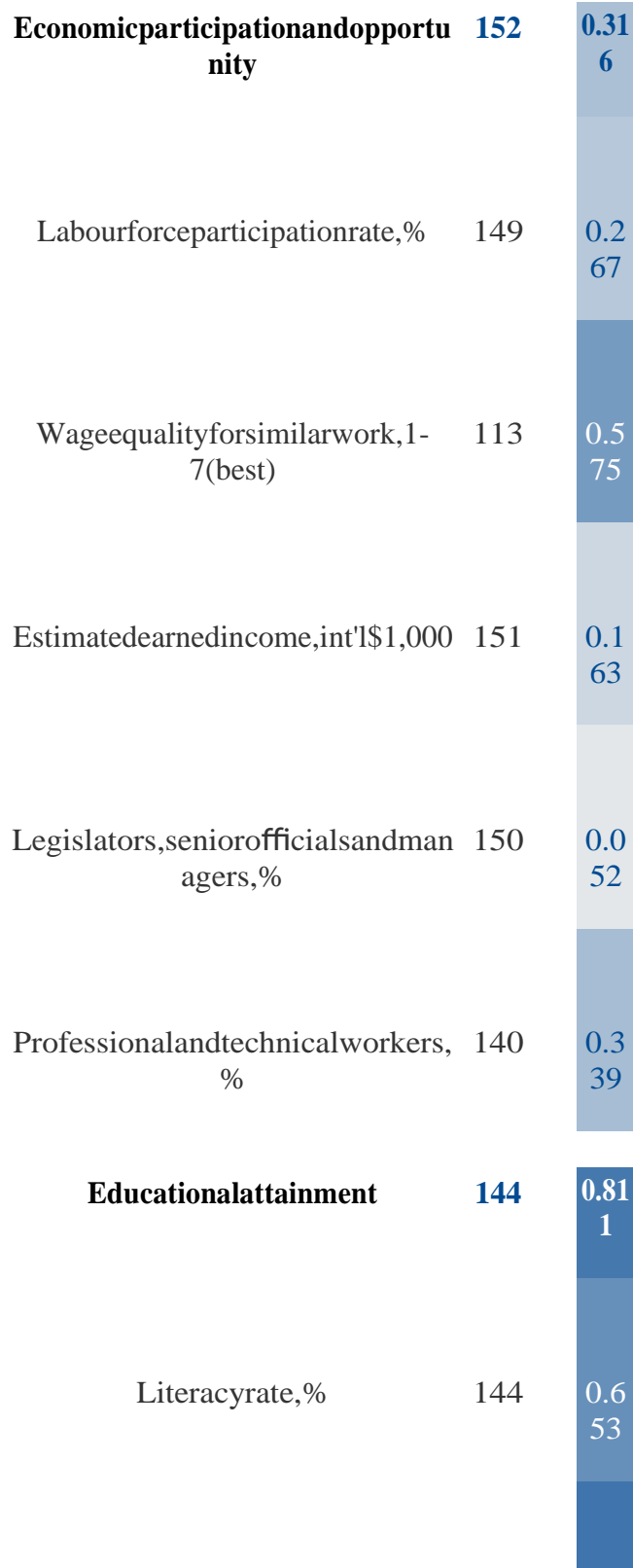
IV. CONTEMPORARY PRACTICES IN PAKISTAN WITH RESPECT TO SOCIO-ECONOMIC RIGHTS OF WOMEN

Pakistan has a long list of pro-women legislation moreover it’s an Islamic Republic with Muslim majority and it has been established earlier that Islam has presented perfect model for the development of women and ensuring their socio-economic empowerment, however women are suffering worst dilemma in Pakistan and are exposed to every kind of discrimination, violence and abuse. The political disability, socio-economic discrepancies, poor implementation mechanism and orthodox cultural practices that got no favour from religion, can be categorised as main reason behind this. Hence in such background, the legislation no matter how well drafted, remains good for paper only.

Pakistan’s Global gender Gap Index is as follows:

		2006score	2021Score
GlobalGenderGapIndex	112	0.543	0.556
Economicparticipationandopportu nity	112	0.369	0.316
Educationalattainment	110	0.706	0.811
Healthandsurvival	112	0.951	0.944
Politicalempowerment	37	0.148	0.154

Source: Global Gender Gap Report,2021, p310.



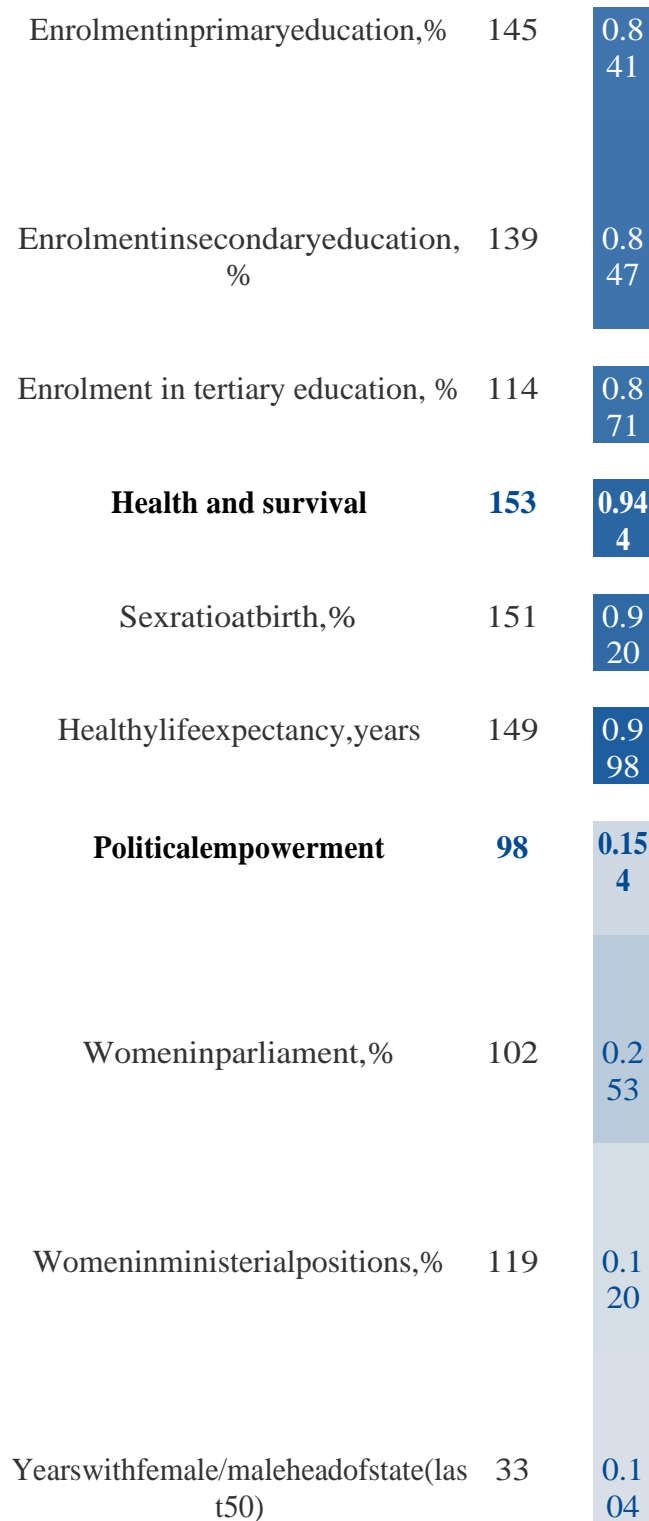


Figure 02: Source: Global Gender Gap Report, 2021, p311. Following is the summary disclosing plight of Pakistani women.

Gender discrimination

Gender discrimination refers to “the practice of granting or denying rights or privileges to a person(s) based on their gender” (Iqbal et. all, 2012). Despite the clear Islamic principles, excellent constitutional provisions and other national and provincial legislation granting and promoting equality, women are facing worst kind of discrimination particularly on basis of gender. In Pakistan gender discrimination exists in various forms it starts from home where mostly female child is not welcomed by family and extends to denying or restricting her fundamental freedoms at every platform. Hence due to this a woman suffer denial of fiscal and socio-legal rights, forced marriages, domestic violence, and verbal and sexual abuses etc.

In terms of gender equality Pakistan is ranked at 151 out of 153 countries according to Global Gender Gap Index report 2020 (Ahmed, 2019). A 2018 survey calculated overall literacy in Pakistan as 58%, with male’s at 70 percent and female at 48 percent (Alva, 2018). At present about 32% of girls are out of school, among other factors this leads to early marriage, lack of decent employment opportunities and insecure future (Jatoi, 2020). Similarly, owing to unfair and inadequate work opportunities and unsafe working conditions the proportion of women employment remain far less than men, percentage of women in police force is as slow as 1.9% the position is more or less similar in other administrative and organisational arenas, report shows that only 3% females are able to reach at prominent position of senior officials, legislators and managers, in comparison to 97% males (Ali et. All, 2015-16). Data revealed that total female labour force participation rate remain at about 20% in 2020. Despite of constitutional protections in favour of pregnant women (Constitution, 2973 art. 37(e)) and other women friendly legislation, the practice of dismissing women of non-governmental jobs due to their pregnancy continues, moreover, availing other maternity benefit is also challenging for them (Naqvi, 2020). Most institutions are not fair toward new mothers, in addition to the tough working works along with non-provision of day care centres for children also serve as major hallmark on women employment. Additionally, domestic restrictions, gender base wages gap, unfair wages, unequal work opportunities and workplace harassment contributes to the plights of working women (Khan, 2020).

Violence against women

Despite of having active efforts in drafting The Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, 2010 and Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2012, in addition to other provincial(s) legislation on subject, the situation of women has not improved. A recent study shows that 60 percent to 70 percent of women are subject to some sort of abuse in Pakistan and one out of every five women suffer from domestic violence, the ratio has raised up to 20% in recent years. Furthermore, about 5,000 women are killed each year because of domestic violence and thousands are left disabled (Report, 2020).

In Pakistan violence against women also take a form of mainstream cultural practices that though are considered strictly illicit by region and forbidden by law, but are prevailing in society and are widely accepted by most of the people of particular custom. This include the brutalities of honour killing (popularly known as Karo-kari), Swara (Giving women over to victim party for reconciliation in case of rivalry, murder or abduction), Vani (Marrying young girls for the settlement of disputes), Haq Bakhshi (Marriage with the Quran, denying her all the advantages of matrimony) etc (Iqbal et. All, 2012). A 2018 report claims that there are estimated 1,000 honour killing in Pakistan each year (HRC Report, 2019). According to a report published in 2004 as result of karo-kari more than 4,000 people have died in the last 6 years. The victims include about 2,800 women and over 1,300 men (Felix, 2004). A recent report of “The Human Rights

Commission of Pakistan” shows that around 460 cases of honour killings were reported in 2017, with 194 males and 376 females as victims. While every life is equally dignified the result shows that women are about twice more prey to this violent custom.

According to a recent report Pakistan has ranked at number sixth in the list of most dangerous and unsafe countries for women and seventh in sexual violence, including domestic violence (Siddiqui, 2013). The alarming situation of violence indicates that the laws for protection of women are good on papers only and incidents like Punjab motor-way gang rape is a question mark on performance of law enforcing agencies (Jatoi, 2020).

Socio-political disparity

Socio-political disparity of women reveals their plight from domestic to organisational levels (Bhattacharya, 2014). Hence women are facing unequal treatment from their houses where even her birth is felt as an unpleasant event owing to the fear of orthodox cultural practices and the situation only gets worse as we move with the idea of women empowerment from domestic to national level. One of the most the significant factor to good governance lies in making the right choice for electing the people’s representative in government, by exercising the fundamental right to vote. In this aspect to the position of women is anything but satisfactory. Despite of having excellent laws in the form of Election Act, (2017) that pledges to ensure full and active electoral participation of women, the situation remains disappointing. Pakistan has population of 207.7 in total out which almost half are women (National Population Census, 2017). The reason behind the electoral barriers faced by women is the unsatisfactory role of political parties towards ensuring active involvement of women in contacting/approaching their political representatives as to communicate before or after elections to express their issues and concerns. Data from a survey report of 2018 reveals that women remained three times less likely than men to have been mobilised by political parties. The representation of women too is not really welcoming, in 2018 the percentage of female make only about 20% to the total number of parliamentarians in Pakistan. At present only 3% female politicians have arrived through general election and 17% has got the reserved seats (Noreen et. All, 2019).

Economic discrepancy

It has been established already that active involvement of women in employment sector is not only crucial for fiscal empowerment of women but also contribute greatly to national development. Nevertheless, the concept of economic empowerment of women in Islam is not limited to granting right them to earn, Islam has forwarded exceptional principles, like inheritance, Mehr and right to maintenance, to name a few, to fiscally develop women. The Islamic republic of Pakistan has thus excellent legislation at federal and provincial level in the form of Family laws, provision related to women right to inheritance, maintenance and Mehr, laws pertaining to ban Dowry and Bridal Gifts and prohibit discrimination with respect to employment and economic empowerment etc. However, their implementation remains challenging owing to poor execution strategies and orthodox cultural practices, hence earning opportunities are not favourable towards women, their right to inheritance, dower and maintenance is suppressed, and practice of dowry is common. Not only that cultural practices are depriving women these rights but the exercise of these orthodox norms lead to brutal chronic affects for females in terms of violence against them that can even cause their death.

Different laws have been drafted to protect property rights of women namely Muslim Family Laws Ordinance, 1961, Muslim Personal Law Shariat Application Act, 1962, Partition Act 1893,

and Prevention of Anti-Women Practices Act, 2011 etc. The recent Women's Property Rights Act, 2020 is also encouraging toward safeguarding women's interest, under this law the Islamabad administrative authorities have recovered a house from land grabbers and restored the possession to its legal female heir, who is an old widow (Chaudhry, 2020).

In pre-Islamic period certain amount was paid to the father of bride as her sale price and was popularly understood as bride-price, Islam abolished this humiliating custom and replaced it with the glorious principle of Mehr, which is exclusive right of bride and is presented to her as a gift and gesture of affection, however in some areas of Pakistan the ill practice of bride-price is continued (Henry, 1968). Additionally, in case of Mehr to the customary practices precede the principles of Islam and Laws of country, hence in most of cases (where Mehr is not already paid) demanding Mehr by the wife is seen as an obscene.

The courts in Pakistan always came forward to rescue women rights in their leading judgements for instance recent ruling by Supreme court of Pakistan has declared that so called "relinquishment" by female members of the family regarding their entitlement to inheritance is contrary to both public policy and shariah. Decision came keeping in view the vulnerability of women, where they are sometime compelled to waive their share.(Malik, 2020) Similarly in another case the supreme court has decided that the gifts given to bride at time of marriage mark her property, she has every right to use it according to her choice and no one is allowed to intervene in exercise of her right. However, it is commonly understood that owing to strict patriarchal and cultural practices women seldom make it to bring their cases to court of law and are thus largely deprived of their property rights.

Consequently, in terms of protecting the property rights Pakistan is ranked at 116 out of total 129 countries globally and 18 out of 19 countries in region, according to report of International Property Rights Index (IPRI) 2020. This shows the ineffective implementation of property rights in general and the situation gets even worse when it comes to protecting women rights to property.

In order to restrict dowry practices in Pakistan, government has taken some very efficient steps in past, this includes legislation in form of West Pakistan Dowry (Prohibition of Display) Act, 1967; Dowry and Bridal Gifts (Restriction) Act, 1976; The Marriage (Prohibition of Wasteful Expenses) Act, 1997; The Marriage Functions (Ostentatious Displays) Ordinance, 1999 and The Marriage Functions (Prohibition of Ostentatious Displays and Wasteful Expenses) Ordinance, 2000, however the victimisation of women in terms of practising dowry got no sufficient improvement. According to 2017 survey 56 percent females are expected to bring dowry. Subjecting women to domestic violence on issues of "insufficient" dowry is common in Pakistan, such cases even to their death (Pakistan Today, 2019). A 2019 report listed Pakistan at 3rd in highest rate of dowry deaths. According to report the reported dowry deaths each year are as two thousand.

V. Conclusions

From the preceding sections, it is concluded that the socio-economic empowerment of women in Pakistan need special attention by law making institutions and policy makers. In Pakistan, women's population is higher than of men. Women face a lot of problems in protection of their basic human rights i.e. education, employment and health in particular. Socio-economic conditions of women are getting worse day by day due to non-availability of protection of basic human rights and facilities. This article reveals that women's empowerment in socio-economic sector is based on lack of resources, facilities at domestic level. Pakistan has obligations to

promote, protect and fulfil basic human rights of women. Thus, due to their vulnerability progressive realization of their rights is essential for women's development at national and international level.

Vi. Recommendations

It is recommended that due to vulnerability of women in Pakistan, there is need to implement provisions of law in its letter and spirit. Progressive steps should be taken for women's empowerment and available laws and policies should be implemented effectively.

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