

Gender in My Country

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For me, gender means specific roles and responsibilities which are given on the basis of sex. Pakistan is a Muslim secular country where now the state gives rights to women, who account for half of its population. The Constitution of Pakistan also gives rights to eunuchs or the third gender.

For the last few years, Pakistan has improved a lot on gender equality and made good laws for the protection of women. The supreme court of Pakistan also gives eunuchs the rights to obtain national identity cards as well as to vote. But still women in Pakistan are oppressed by men because of patriarchal structures, and are not sure about their rights in society. They have neither access to economic resources through jobs nor power to make decisions about their own lives. As women have only access to their private work, they don't work outside the home.

Women are oppressed and told from their childhood about gender-specific roles symbolized by the concept of pink and blue. By custom, they are told to be good daughters/wives/mothers etc.

In Pakistan, we don't see gender equality in every sector; for example, women make up about half of the country's population but don't have equal rights. When we look at the parliament of Pakistan, the total number of seats in the national assembly is 342 but just 22.2% of them are occupied by women. The state provides opportunities unequally between the sexes, and has some discriminatory laws which diminish women's rights such as the Law of Evidence and the Law of Citizenship.

As I am from a deprived province in Pakistan and belong to a tribal family, it seems to me that gender equality in my country is in a very early stage. I also have a five-year experience of working in the social sector at the grassroots level for humanitarian causes. I work on gender issues in my province where even the term "gender" is not accepted. The patriarchal system doesn't allow women to have equal rights in every sphere of education as seen in the female literacy rate of 45%, which is very low as compared to men.

Pakistani women can neither marry men of their own choices nor get jobs without asking males. They are supposed to fulfil the roles limited to domestic affairs, and their rights are violated by men most of the time.

Women in Pakistan are not treated very well in rural areas; some are killed in the name of honor, acid throwing cases are happening a lot, and domestic violence is at the peak. So overall, the status of women or gender equality is not very good in Pakistan.

They are unequally treated and the patriarchy favors the one specific gender in Pakistan.

Lastly, I must say this: Pakistan is in the stage of improving all these issues regarding gender, as the former government has worked a lot on gender mainstreaming and undertaken measures to achieve gender equality. The Pakistani government has taken good initiatives for the empowerment of women, such as giving loans to women for their economic support. These initiatives will somehow improve the status of women.

The concept of gender in my country is like a new born baby. As a feminist, I believe we can bring about change very soon and give equal rights to all genders. Understanding gender is very important. We have to work a lot at the grassroots level.

Now the youth of Pakistan are also interested to bring equality to all genders. I am from Baluchistan and working for the sake of human rights including women's rights. I believe there are thousands of young people like me working on these serious issues.

Gender awareness in my country is being enhanced, and we will see the difference very soon. Until several years ago, there was a law called the Hudood Ordinance which was enacted by the military regime of an army general and was discriminatory against the rights of women. But now is the time to change all these sorts of laws and give protection to all genders. To that end, the state, NGOs, organizations and others are working on gender mainstreaming.