

## ***Religious Factors Influencing Denial of Female Higher Education in Pakhtun Society***

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### ***Abstract:***

*The current study aims at investigating the influence of religious factors on the denial of women higher education in Pakhtun society. The study was conducted in two higher education institutions of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa i.e. Bacha Khan University Charsadda and University of Malakand. A positivistic stance was adopted to conduct this study using questionnaire as tool of data collection. Data was collected from 200 female students of these institutions to know about their perception on religious aspects of their life and denial to their rights of higher education. . A Chi square test was used to measure association between religious factors and denial of women right to higher education. The study revealed a significant association of different religious factors such as priority of culture over religion, less support from religious clerics, female lack of awareness about religious education with denial of female access to higher education. The study concluded that importance of culture in comparison to religion, women's lack of awareness regarding female education, misinterpretation of religious texts against co-education and less support of religious clerics are the key factors associated with denial of women right to higher education. Religious scholars should speak for women's right to education, women awareness of their religious right to education, a clear cut line of demarcation between cultural tenets and Islamic practices and*

*establishment of separate institutions for both male and female were some of the recommendations forwarded in the light of study findings.*

**Keywords:** *female, religious rights, education, religious clerics and denial*

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## **Background of the Study**

Women are considered inferior at large. The subordination of female is observed in various forms in different societies (Bari, 2005). Women comprise the world's fifty percent and still they lag far behind men while seeking education (Yasmeen, 2005). It is believed that higher education generates critical thinking and rational approaches in students towards problems of the society. It also enables citizens to be law-abiding and useful to another (UNESCO, 1998). To pursue education at college and degree level is known as higher education (Nath, 2014). The enrolment ratio of women in higher education institutes in Pakistan is very low. Only 5.1 percent of the students aged 17-23 avail the opportunity of reading at universities and women comprise 2.5 percent of it (UNESCO, 2014).

Countless researches were done by sociologists to highlight discriminatory attitudes towards female students in getting higher education. The literature review provides knowledge and guideline to researchers regarding their research topic. It depicts the previous published work of scholars and researchers in the related field (Sekaran, 1992). Literature review is the secondary information about a particular topic or issue, it refines the topic. It provides scholar discussion on particular issue. It provides theoretical foundation of a topic and covers major issues from start to finish (Brown & McIntyre, 1981). In this context, Langeveld (1965) explained that literature review does not mean to find out cause and effect relationship between variables, but it

simply means that we do best than previous study. Data has been collected from various sources in which the women participation in higher education is indicated from around the world. Literature review has two sections, first section concerned with universal overview of women participation in higher education around the world, hurdles to women participation in higher education with reference to the study universe.

### **Worldwide Challenges faced by Female Students in Higher Education**

In real sense democracy means full participation of both genders in entire field of life. Similarly a country can never become real democratic when its half population is excluded from all sectors (IDEA, 2004). Similarly, Bano (2009) demonstrates that all over the world socio-economic challenges are a main barrier to female higher education and existing structure of the society barriers to their participation in higher education. In this relation, Omvedt (2005) illustrates that socio-cultural setup of South Asian region minimize female enrolment in higher education due to male dominancy. Female excluded from higher education on the basis of various socio-cultural factors (Bari, 2005). There are various factors in Khyber PakhtunKhwa that obstruct female from obtaining higher education which includes the following, customs and tradition, norms and values, patriarchy, 'purdah' (veil) and house of queen (Ansari, 2012). However, following challenges to female higher education can be discussed as,

#### **Religious factor**

Religion play a dominant role to aware women about their right and restriction is compulsory on certain arguments. All religion of the world play authoritative role to distinguish between right and wrong and permit women to participate according to their need (UNRISD, 2007). Women who actively participate in religious gathering it improve their potentialities and bring glowing change in their lives (Flora, 1975). In this connection,

Mahmood (2002) is of the view women who got religious knowledge and complete aware about Islamic laws, play a flourish role to change patriarchal system of society. Women understanding on religious knowledge struggle to minimize socio-cultural barriers that impede female from higher education. In current senior the relationship of religion and women are not explained by religious leaders. Religious supporters deprived women participation in various movements such as election campaign, getting education, complete ban from labour market (Offenhauer, 2005).

An entire religion of the world, men got authorities position over women. Islam is a dominant religion who grants equal right to both genders but unfortunately misinterpretation of Islamic texts women are considered servitude and men become head of all institutions (Afkhami, 2002; Callaway & Creevey, 2003). Differentiation exists in both culture and religion. In some cases, religion may allow women a certain privilege, but the overriding culture may show tactful opposition to it (Abu-Zayd, 1998). In Afghanistan parents feels frustration to sending daughters for getting education. They were of the view; if daughters become educated then they don't maintain cultural value as well as traditional lifestyles and ultimately it affect socialization of children (UNESCO, 2012). Majority religions of the world are against the women education in co-educational institutions and religious clerics are unwilling to women education (Haider, 2013).

### **Women Rights in Islam**

Islam is a complete code of life which grants equal privileges to both genders in all spheres of life. There is no religious constraint for women to get education or participate in working place outside their home (Hakim & Aziz, 1998). There is no discrimination on the basis of sex in Islam. Islam emphasis, both men and women are equal human being and both are granted

with equal rights. Both have similar responsibilities to perform i.e. prayer, rituals, fasting and so on. Piety (Good deeds) of an individual is responsible for superiority over other (Adeel, 2010).

O Lord! Increase my knowledge”. (Al Quran: Surah, Ta-Ha-114)

Read, In the name of your Lord, who has created. He has created human from a clot. Read!

And your Lord is the Most Generous. Who has taught by the pen? He has taught man that which he knew not. (Al Quran: Surah, Al-Alaq; 1-5).

Explanation of the above verses from the Holy Quran and Hadiths (Saying of Prophet Muhammad S.A.W.W) is fever to support women education. It is apparent from the Holy Quran and Hadiths that the acquisition of knowledge is obligatory for women in the same way as in the case of men.

Hazrat Anas states that the Holy Prophet (PBUH) stated that, acquisition of knowledge is binding on all Muslims (both men and women without any discrimination). [Narrated by Ibn Maja in al-Sunan, 1:81:: 224]

«طَلَبُ الْعِلْمِ فَرِيضَةٌ عَلَى كُلِّ مُسْلِمٍ».

Acquire knowledge even if you may have to go to China for it. [Narrated by al-Bazzar in al-Musnad, 1:175 §95.]

«أَطْلُبُوا الْعِلْمَ وَلَوْ بِالصَّيْنِ».

Almighty Allah makes the path to paradise easier for him who walks on it for getting knowledge. [Narrated by Sahih Muslim, 4:2074]

«مَنْ سَلَكَ طَرِيقًا يَلْتَمِسُ فِيهِ عِلْمًا سَهَّلَ اللَّهُ لَهُ بِهِ طَرِيقًا إِلَى الْجَنَّةِ».

## History of Female Higher Education in Pakistan

In Pakistan higher educational institutions faced intricate problems such as rapid expansion in population, private sector cannot participate, lack

of resource, lack of experienced man power, political instability, contradiction in the strategies of various government, wastage of inefficient educational administration system and depressed implementation of programs and policies (Hayes, 1987). After India in 1947, there has only one public university: Punjab university in Lahore and there was no private university at the time. Growth has been witnessed the last three decades but quality of education has never been the theme (Hoodbhoy, 2009).

The higher educational institution ranking of Pakistan is lowest in the entire globe; in 2005 total enrolment of students were 2.9 percent between the exact age of 17 and 23 as compare to others developing countries such as Korea and India, which rise at 68 percent and 10 percent respectively (Government of Pakistan 2005; &ADB, 2000). Women literacy ratio in Pakistan was 36 percent which is very low as compared to neighbouring countries such as Sri Lanka where women literacy rate was 78 percent and 38 percent in India. Enrolment rate of female students in Pakistan universities is 2.9 percent, because government of Pakistan gives importance to professional, vocational and technical education of women but now day's continuous improvement has been found in women higher educational sector (UNESCO, 2014).

According to UNESCO's EFA Global Monitoring report 2015, the Public Sector expenditure on Education as percentage of GDP, in other countries of the region was 2.1 percent in Bangladesh, 4.9 percent in Bhutan, 3.2 percent in India, 4.7 percent in Iran and 8.0 percent in Maldives, Pakistan is lowest in Public Expenditure on Education sector (PSLM, 2013-14). Major reasons for low enrolment of students in higher education is lack of progress may lie

in the fact that in 2006–07, Pakistan was spending only 2.5 percent of its GDP on education which is considerably below the South Asian regional average and UNESCO’s recommendation of 4 percent (Government of Pakistan, 2009).

### **Female Higher Education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa**

Currently in Pakistan 189 universities are functioning. A number of institutions of higher learning are active in Pakistan but the higher education commission recognizes 179 institutions. Total 33 universities are functioning in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. According to PSLM<sup>1</sup> report 2010-11, the literacy rate for men is 65 percent and 28 percent for women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. According to fresh data, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa literacy rate is 50 percent (Rehman, Jingdong & Hussain, 2015). Male literacy ratio is 68percent and female literacy rate is 32percent, which shows that almost two out of three women are deprived from getting education (National Commission for Human Development Ministry of Professional & Technical Trainings, 2012).

Since 1972 to 1998, variation exists in literacy ratio of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was 15.50 percent and 35.40 percent, while in 2012, 2013 and 2014, it was 60 percent, 52 percent and 53 percent respectively. In the year 2012, highest ratio of literacy was recorded 60 percent. Due to security threats, families always concerned about sending their children to school (Government of Pakistan, 2006).Despite providing free textbooks and monthly stipend to the students of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 0.8 million students get benefits but majority of the students remain absent from the educational institutions daily. It means that 21percent of the total students in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa remain absent (Dawn, 2015).

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<sup>1</sup> Pakistan Social And Living Standards

Women are treated as commodity in the villages and underdeveloped areas of Pakistan. They are discriminated at different levels i.e. political, social, economic and domestic. Education is the only tool which can equip women to safeguard their due rights and contribute to society in an efficient way. If female are properly educated alongside men, it can be hoped that other discrimination with female will automatically end. Almost huge proportion of the females with secondary education has very limited access to higher education. Various factors are responsible for female limited access to higher education in the current universe i.e. social, economic, geographic, war against terrorism, ‘*Pakhtun*’ culture and other reasons for their. However, significance of female higher education is never denied in the history. This current study was thus; identify the various problems faced by female students in higher education of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

### **Theoretical framework**

Robert K. Merton (1957) illustrates the manifest functions, latent functions, and dysfunction of an institution for the first time. He is of the view that when any part of an organization becomes failure to achieve its aims and objective, called dysfunctional. Both men and women are equal representative of a society and for smooth performance the contribution of both genders are important.

Without women contribution a society can never flourish, in this regard gender inequality is an exceptional example. According to the structural functionalist perspective, women being to men allow the moving parts of function smoothly as everyone in the society knows his or her respective position in the society set up. Gender stratification is very important for smooth functioning of a society while such kind of stratification is sufficient and no need to change such arrangement. This expectation of the structural functionalism affected that it supports the



Status-quo in the social set up. However, without women participation a society can never flourish and for development of society the contribution of one part is not enough and equal participation of both genders are important.

### **Objectives of the study**

1. To identify male dominancy in religion obstructs female from higher education
2. To investigate priority of culture over religion obstructs female from higher education
3. To ascertain the association of aspects of religion with denial of women higher education.

### **Methods and procedures**

In order to know the association of different aspects of religion with denial of female higher education a cross sectional survey was conducted in two selected universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan i.e. Bacha Khan University and University of Malakand. The nature of the study was quantitative and questionnaire was used as a tool of data collection for collecting information from the sample size of 200 female respondents. The sample size was selected through proportional allocation method in which 135 respondents were from university of Malakand and 65 respondents were from Bacha Khan University.

A conceptual framework was developed based on a comprehensive literature review on the subject at hand. The conceptual framework consisted of independent variable i.e. religious aspects of female higher education and a dependent variable i.e. denial of female higher education. Data were entered into SPSS 20 versions and analysed using cross tabulation through the application of Chi Square test statistics to ascertain

association between the dependent and independent variables. The results of the analysis along with critical discussion are given in the next section.

### Results and Discussions

The data regarding present study “understanding problems faced by female students in higher education (a case study of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) was collected, organized and interpreted by using the computer programming SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). The association between independent variables and dependent variable was determined with the help of using bi-variate analysis procedures, to expose the direction of the responses. This type of analysis described the responses either favoring or opposing any aspect of variables under study.

**Table-1 Association of Religious Aspects and Denial of Female Higher Education**

Factors	Attitude	Denial of female higher education							
		1	1.125	1.25	1.375	1.5	1.625	1.875	Total
Male dominancy in religion	Yes	5	31	20	13	5	2	1	77
	No	13	55	21	21	10	2	0	122
	Uncertain	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
	Total	18	87	41	34	15	4	1	200
Religious factors	Yes	6	23	8	5	2	0	0	44
	No	12	63	32	27	13	4	1	152
	Uncertain	0	1	1	2	0	0	0	4

	Total	18	87	41	34	15	4	1	200
Misinterpretation of religious texts	Yes	14	76	37	34	13	4	1	179
	No	4	9	4	0	1	0	0	18
	Uncertain	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	3
	Total	18	87	41	34	15	4	1	200
Priority of culture over religion	Yes	15	82	37	32	14	4	0	184
	No	2	5	4	2	1	0	0	14
	Uncertain	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	2
	Total	18	87	41	34	15	4	1	200
Religious texts are against the co-education	Yes	7	25	12	4	3	2	0	53
	No	11	60	28	29	12	2	1	143
	Uncertain	0	2	1	1	0	0	0	4
	Total	18	87	41	34	15	4	1	200
Less support of religious clerics	Yes	8	27	8	4	0	0	0	47
	No	9	59	33	30	14	4	1	150
	Uncertain	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	3
	Total	18	87	41	34	15	4	1	200
	Yes	12	28	15	10	8	1	0	74

Lack of command on religious knowledge	No	6	59	26	24	7	3	1	126
	Total	18	87	41	34	15	4	1	200
Female higher education is forbidden in Islam	Yes	1	6	3	3	1	0	0	14
	No	17	80	38	30	14	4	1	184
	Uncertain	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	2
	Total	18	87	41	34	15	4	1	200
Female are unaware about religious education	Yes	13	61	27	25	7	4	0	137
	No	4	23	14	8	8	0	0	57
	Uncertain	1	3	0	1	0	0	1	6
	Total	18	87	41	34	15	4	1	200

Source: Field Survey, 2017

### **Association of Religious Aspects and Denial of Female Higher Education of Respondents**

Research findings show the association of various factors that restrict female from getting higher education. These results showed that a non-significant relationships ( $P= 0.904$ ) explored between male dominance in religion and female right of getting higher education. It could be deduced that men are dominant in 'Pakhtun' society, because they generate the teaching of Islam to one another but it does not mean that they were dominant over women while exercising religious authority to ban and minimize their participation in any field of life. There was harmony that real Islamic teachings encompass a much additional moderate view of women

situation in the community. However, it never hinders female educational rights. It only restricts female to get education under the prescribed inscriptions of Islam i.e. with covered face and body and restricted interaction with the opposite gender. Nabalarua (2002) asserted that as male has a dominant figure in religious affairs and all activities revolved around them.

Furthermore, a non-significant relationship ( $P= 0.695$ ) existed between various religious factors and denial of female higher education. Education is compulsory for both man and woman in Islam. Islam is never against women education. Instead Islam encourages us to provide education to woman. And this was the rationale the wives of the Holy Prophet had achieved the highest knowledge. If there is no female education otherwise it is frail here among '*Pakhtun*' the cause is not Islam and the researcher are oppose this. If this learning is inside the boundaries wall of religious instruct, such as women privacy, chastity and dignity not being menace, we must accept women education as openly and publicly as we acknowledge it for men and boys. Islam persists on women education. The findings of the current study was in consonance with McGuire (2002) who stated that all religions have accorded women inferior status and relegated them to a secondary position however, Islamic feminists argue Islam has assigned Muslim women a position of dignity and honour.

Moreover, a non-significant relationships ( $P= 0.397$ ) explored between misinterpretation of religious texts by the community members and denial of female higher education. It can be deduced from the findings that religion and women education two of civilization most ancient endeavours, have extensive had a secure relationship. Social scientists and historians have write about this association and how these two influence each other. The findings further explored that modernize trends in society, the people

are aware and more exposed to modern education and social competition. The aforementioned non-significant relationship between the misinterpretation of religious texts by the community members and female higher education reflects that misinterpretation does not hinder female higher education. In this consonance, dogmatic and ignorant masses misinterpret religious texts and misguide the common folk. Women are vulnerable population and they fall a prey to these demagogues (Walton, 2013; & Zents, 2005).

Contrary to the above, a highly significant association ( $P= 0.000$ ) was found between priority of culture over religion and denial of female higher education. It can be deduced from the results that in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa priority of culture over religion are practices strictly. All people knows that women have same right of getting education but normative structure of the '*Pakhtun*' society restrict female from getting education. Same results was observed by Abu-Zayd (1998) who stated that differentiation exists between religious and cultural values; while in some cases religion is not responsible for the deprivation of female education but the overriding culture stand as opposition to female higher education.

A non-significant relationship ( $P= 0.763$ ) observed between religious texts as against the co-education and female right of getting higher education. These results highlighted that the Holy Qur'an and acted example of Muhammad (P B U H) promote the rights of men and women equally to search for knowledge. The Holy Quran instruction to each Muslim tries to obtain knowledge, regardless of biological sex. Islam especially lays emphasis on the acquisition of knowledge for both male and female. Islam never bans on co-education but have clear cut limitation about '*pardah*' (veil) to cover complete body (Adeel, 2010).

A significant relationship ( $P= 0.032$ ) was found between less support from religious clerics and inheritance right of getting higher education. These results showed that local religious clerics never support female higher education in co-educational institutions. In this regard, Haider (2013) elaborated that religious misperception squeezes female higher education in co-educational environment because proper '*pardah*' (veil) is impossible for female in heterogeneous environment due to lack of proper arrangement.

Moreover, a non-significant relationship ( $P= 0.087$ ) observed between lack of command on religious knowledge of female folk and female right of getting higher education. Although Muslim women have become an invisible population whose voices have traditionally been omitted from the ideological and theoretical frameworks of Islam, this phenomenological research study reveals some practical steps that demonstrate the need to narrow the existing gap of knowledge and literature in understanding Islam and how it can promote gender equality for Muslim women. This phenomenological research study also revealed that how the intersection of culture, traditions, patriarchy and religion can be restrictive of Muslim women's rights within Islam. Khan (2010) rightly comments that female are not aware of their rights and religious knowledge provision of such right could affect the life of female. People with higher levels of religious knowledge tend to be more knowledgeable about getting higher education (U.S. Religious Knowledge Survey, 2010).

Similarly, a non-significant relationship ( $P= 0.361$ ) observed between female higher education is forbidden in Islam and denial of female higher education. Almost all religions acknowledge getting of knowledge and Islam specially lays emphasis on the acquisition of knowledge for both male and female. These findings were in line to the conclusion of Adida

(2011) who disclose that Islam teaches the message of equality and there is no distinction between male and female. A well-known scholar Hazarat Aisha and Holy prophet (PBUH) always supported women to seek knowledge. Islam as a religion inspires and motivates women to seek out education opportunities but norms of 'Pakhtun' may have some problems with that. As the patriarchal system exists in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and discouraging women empowering as it will bring disequilibrium and a chaos in their peaceful lives (Adeel, 2010).

Contrary to the above, a highly significant relationship ( $P= 0.000$ ) existed between female is unaware about their religious rights of education and denial of female higher education. Lack of religious knowledge deprives women because they never discuss her rights which were given by religion. These result inferred that male is a dominant figure in religious affairs while women doesn't take interest to learn religious education. Majority of the women are unaware about religious rights of education and they are totally out from political affairs of the country (Banu, 2009; & Lerner, 1986).

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

It is concluded religion is not directly related to denial of women right to higher education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa rather misinterpretation of religious guideline, lack of awareness of women regarding their religious knowledge about women education, more importance of culture in comparison to religion (conscious or unconscious), less support of religious clerics for female education are the key factors associated with denial of women right to higher education. Cultural factors are sometimes considered



religious factors but the influence of culture is more in denial of the women right to higher education. The most important factor is the lack of religious knowledge of women regarding their right to education in the religion that result in lowering their capacity to speak for and come out for education as a right.

It is suggested that religious scholars should speak for the rights of women to education not only to men but special focus should be given to women. Women awareness of their religious right toward their education would result in enhancing their participation in higher education. Women also need to take interest in learning about religion especially their rights in Islam regarding education and land ownership etc. A clear cut line of demarcation between cultural tenets and Islamic practices is needed i.e. honor of women and Purdah in Pakhtun society and its concept in Islam to avoid any ambiguity which result women deprivation of their right to higher education. Separate institutions for both male and female need to be encouraged because Pakhtun society is highly patriarchal and co-educational environment for women education is not a favourable option for many parents.

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