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Baloch Women: The Unsung Heroes of Pakistan

Baloch women are a testament to resilience and achievement, not only serving as the pride of Balochistan but also as shining examples for the entire nation. They have shattered traditional barriers, demonstrating their capabilities across diverse fields, both within Pakistan and on the international stage.

The achievements of these women are truly inspiring. ASP Pari Gul Tareen, hailing from Pishin, exemplifies this success. The judiciary has also witnessed groundbreaking milestones. Justice Tahira Safdar’s appointment as the first-ever female Chief Justice of the Balochistan High Court stands as a historic achievement, paving the way for future generations of women in law. Similarly, Batool Asadi, the pride of Balochistan, made history as the first female Assistant Commissioner of Quetta.

In the armed forces, Baloch women are breaking stereotypes and demonstrating their unwavering commitment to national security. Saira Batool’s distinction as the first female fighter pilot from Balochistan is a powerful symbol of courage and determination. Zakia Jamali’s pioneering role as the first female commissioned Naval officer further underscores the growing presence of Baloch women in the defense sector. PSP officer Shazia Sarwar, a Baloch lady from Bolan who served as DPO in Layyah, Punjab, demonstrates strength and resilience, especially considering her home region has been targeted by terrorist elements.

It is crucial to recognize that the true representation of Baloch women lies in these stories of achievement and empowerment, not in the narratives propagated by terrorist organizations and their sympathizers. Women who have been exploited by such groups, or those who promote their agendas, do not reflect the aspirations and contributions of the vast majority of Baloch women.

Tragically, women are often targeted and manipulated by terrorist organizations like the BLA and BLF. The case of Mahrosh Baloch, the daughter of a suicide bomber, who remains in the custody of the BLA, highlights the vulnerability of women in conflict zones. Similarly, the exploitation of Mahal Baloch, who was allegedly used to transport a suicide jacket, demonstrates the cynical manipulation tactics employed by these groups.

The success stories of Pari Gul Tareen, Justice Tahira Safdar, Batool Asadi, Saira Batool, Zakia Jamali, and Shazia Sarwar, among countless others, paint a far more accurate picture of the strength, resilience, and ambition of Baloch women. Their contributions are invaluable, and their achievements are a source of inspiration for all of Pakistan. These women are not defined by the actions of extremists, but by their unwavering commitment to their communities and their nation.

Skill Development Can Drive Economic Growth

Pakistan is a country with a growing population and a significant portion of its workforce employed in various sectors. In recent years, there has been a recognition of the importance of skill development in driving economic growth. Developing a skilled workforce is vital for Pakistan to compete in the global economy, attract investments, and create opportunities for its citizens. The relationship between Pakistan’s workforce, skill development, and economic growth, highlighting the importance of investing in education and training to boost the country’s economic potential.

Investing in skill development in Pakistan’s workforce is crucial for driving economic growth. A skilled workforce can drive innovation, enhance productivity, and improve competitiveness in the global market. A report by the World Bank, investing in human capital, including education and skill development, can lead to significant economic returns for a country (World Bank, 2019). In Pakistan, there is a need to focus on enhancing the quality of education and training programs to equip individuals with the skills necessary to succeed in a rapidly evolving job market.

Skill development plays a key role in addressing unemployment and underemployment in Pakistan. Providing individuals with the necessary skills and training, the country can bridge the gap between the demand for skilled labor and the available supply. The Pakistan Economic Survey 2020-21, the country’s labor-force participation rate is around 53%, with a significant portion of the

workforce engaged in low-skilled or informal jobs (Government of Pakistan, 2021). Investing in skill development programs, Pakistan can improve the employability of its workforce and create opportunities for economic growth.

One of the key skill development initiatives in Pakistan is the National Vocational & Technical Training Commission (NAVTTTC), established to provide vocational training programs to equip individuals with technical skills suitable for various industries. The NAVTTTC collaborates with public and private sector entities to offer training in a wide range of fields such as agriculture, information technology, construction, and hospitality. Tailoring their programs to the needs of specific industries, the NAVTTTC ensures that individuals receive training that is relevant and in demand in the job market.

Important initiative is the Prime Minister’s Hunarmand Pakistan Program, which aims to train youth in high-demand sectors such as artificial intelligence, block chain technology, and e-commerce. Focusing on emerging technologies, this program helps individuals acquire skills that are essential for the digital economy, thereby increasing their employability and earning potential. Recognizing the importance of digital skills in the modern workforce, the Hunarmand Pakistan Program equips participants with the knowledge and expertise needed to succeed in a tech-

nology-driven world.

Several non-profit organizations and private sector entities in Pakistan that offer skill development programs. For example, the Punjab Skills Development Fund (PSDF) partners with industry leaders to provide training in specialized areas such as healthcare, textiles, and automotive engineering. By working closely with employers, the PSDF ensures that its training programs align with industry more attractive to the employers.

Furthermore, skill development can also lead to poverty reduction and social inclusion in Pakistan. Equipping individuals with marketable skills, they are better able to secure stable employment and improve their strong

role in the economic environment as the Asian Development Bank, investing in skills development can increase the potential of workers and create equality by increasing job opportunities and promoting social mobility (Asian Development Bank, 2018). In a country like Pakistan, where a significant portion of the population lives below the poverty line, skill development programs can play a crucial role in improving livelihoods and reducing income disparities.

Skill development is essential for driving economic growth in Pakistan. Investing in education and training programs, the country can build a skilled workforce that is competitive in the global market, reduce unemployment, alleviate poverty, and promote

social inclusion. It is imperative for the government, private sector, and other stakeholders to collaborate in developing comprehensive skill development initiatives that cater to the diverse needs of Pakistan’s workforce. Through strategic investments in human capital, Pakistan can unlock its economic potential and pave the way for sustainable growth and development.

These skill development initiatives in Pakistan have had a significant impact on the workforce, leading to higher employment rates, increased productivity, and better job opportunities for individuals. Equipping people with relevant skills, these programs not only enhance their employability but also contribute to economic growth by filling skills gaps in key industries. Investing in skill development promotes social inclusion and reduces poverty by empowering individuals to secure stable and well-paying jobs.

Pakistan plays a crucial role in addressing the diverse needs of the workforce, preparing individuals for the challenges of a competitive labor market. By offering training in high-demand sectors, collaborating with industry partners and focusing on emerging technologies, these programs help bridge the skills gap and enhance employability. Going forward, continued investment in skill development is essential to ensure that Pakistan’s workforce remains competitive, adaptable, and well equipped for the jobs of the future.

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Cartoon by Amjad Rasmi. (Courtesy of Ashfaq Al-Awsat)

Liberalism: A Path to Freedom, Democracy, and Global Cooperation

Liberalism, as a political and philosophical doctrine, prioritizes individual liberty, egalitarianism, and the preservation of civil rights. It advocates for individuals’ rights to pursue personal development and self-determination within a democratic framework. Grounded in Enlightenment principles, liberalism has evolved to address contemporary concerns such as social equity, economic accessibility, and environmental conservation. By promoting the rule of law and limitations on institutional power, it aims to safeguard human dignity while fostering open discourse and pluralistic perspectives. Striking a balance between progressive reforms and respect for established norms and social cohesion, liberalism enables societies to navigate rapid changes without compromising fundamental principles. Through its commitment to fairness, inclusivity, and progress, liberalism fosters a comprehensive society that upholds individual expression, civic responsibility, and collective prosperity.

In the field of international relations, liberalism stands as a prominent theoretical framework that underscores the importance of collaboration, nonviolence, and worldwide advancement. The following are its fundamental tenets:

1: Diplomatic Cooperation as an Alternative to Military Conflict: Nation-states can employ diplomatic channels and international organizations to address and resolve disputes, thereby avoiding the necessity of armed conflict (Keohane & Nye, 1977).

2: Trade Relations Mitigate Armed Conflicts: Nations with robust economic ties exhibit a reduced propensity for military engagements, as armed conflict disrupts their mutual economic advantages (Angell, 1910).

3: Democratic Peace Theory: It posits that nations with democratic systems of governance are less inclined to engage in armed conflicts with one another,

suggesting that democratic institutions foster peaceful international relations. (Doyle, 1986)

4: Global Organizations Play a Crucial Role: International entities such as the UN, WTO, and EU facilitate transnational cooperation and promote stability through the establishment of guidelines and the resolution of disputes between nations (Keohane, 1984).

5: Human Rights and Global Governance – The fundamental tenets of liberalism encompass the advocacy of human rights, the promotion of international law, and the support for initiatives aimed at establishing an equitable global system, as exemplified by the Fourteen Points Speech. This perspective is integral to the concept of global governance and the protection of individual liberties (Wilson, 1918).

1: Classical Liberalism (17th–19th Century): Classical liberalism emerged during the Enlightenment, emphasizing individual liberty, limited governmental authority, and free-market economics. Philosophers such as John Locke propounded theories of natural rights and the social contract, which subsequently influenced the development of democratic governance. Adam Smith advocated for free-market capitalism, positing that economies function optimally with minimal government intervention (Locke, 1689; Smith, 1776).

2 Liberal Internationalism (19th–20th Century): Liberal ideologies expanded beyond domestic governance to encompass global politics. Immanuel Kant introduced the concept of “perpetual peace” predicated on republican governments and international cooperation. Following World War I, U. S. President Woodrow Wilson proposed the establishment of the League of Nations, with the objective of preventing armed conflict through diplomatic means and collective security measures. Although the League ultimately proved unsuccessful, these principles significantly influenced the formation of the United Nations in the aftermath of World War II (Kant, 1795; Wilson, 1918).

3: Neoliberalism and Institutionalism (Late 20th Century–Present): In the late 20th century and continuing to the present, neoliberalism and institutionalism have gained prominence as globalization has intensified. These theoretical approaches emphasize the significance of economic interconnectedness, open markets, and the role of global organizations such as the World Trade Organization, International Monetary Fund, and United Nations in maintaining international stability. Scholars such as Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye have elucidated the function of international institutions in facilitating cooperation among nations, even within a competitive global environment. This development has expanded liberal thought beyond its traditional focus on democratic systems and market economies to encompass global governance structures and economic strategies (Keohane, 1984; Nye, 1990).

The concept of liberalism has undergone significant transformations since its inception in the 18th and 19th centuries. Initially, it focused on individual liberties, unregulated markets, and limited governmental power, as propounded by intellectuals such as Adam Smith and John Locke. During the 20th century, economic liberalism gained prominence through the works of Milton Friedman and Friedrich Hayek, who advocated for open trade, reduced regulation, and global economic integration. In contemporary times, while liberalism continues to shape global policies, it faces opposition from increasing protectionist measures, government intervention, and economic disparities. Although classical liberalism emphasized minimal state interference, modern liberal thought often seeks to achieve equilibrium between free-market principles and social initiatives to address societal inequalities. Despite ongoing controversies, liberalism remains a prevailing ideology that influences economic and political frameworks worldwide, adapting to current challenges while preserving its fundamental tenets.

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Mahfooz Shaheed Canal - A Necessity for Pakistan’s Agricultural Future

Under the Green Pakistan Initiative, the Mahfooz Shaheed Canal is being constructed to make the barren lands of Cholistan cultivable. This project is fully aligned with Pakistan’s National Water Policy 2018 and will extend from Sulemanki Headworks to Fort Abbas, using only Punjab’s allocated share of water. The 176-kilometer-long canal, built along the Sutlej River, will play a vital role in enhancing agricultural productivity. To facilitate this, the Punjab government has leased 1.2 million acres of land and allocated Rs. 225.34 billion for its construction. From June to October, the canal will utilize

excess floodwater, while in the remaining two months, it will draw from Punjab’s allocated share. The canal’s water capacity will be 4,120 cuses. In the next phase, additional expansions will take place, including a 120-kilometer canal from Fort Abbas to Marot and a 132-kilometer canal from Fort Abbas to Dhundwala, which will significantly increase irrigation capacity and benefit millions of acres of farmland.

According to Clause 8 of the Water Apportionment Accord, provinces have the right to initiate irrigation projects within their allocated water resources. Recognizing its importance, the Indus River System Authority (IRSA) has approved the project with a 4:1 majority

and issued a No Objection Certificate (NOC). Since IRSA includes representation from all provinces, this approval highlights the project’s transparency and compliance with national water-sharing agreements. Additionally, 4,566 million acre-feet (MAF) of water has been added to the Indus Basin Irrigation System, and with the completion of Diamer-Bhasha Dam (2028) and Mohmand Dam (2027), an extra 7.08 MAF of

water will become available, benefiting all provinces, including Sindh. It is also worth noting that India developed the Indira Canal in Rajasthan in 2005 to reclaim barren lands for agriculture, a move similar to Pakistan’s Mahfooz Shaheed

Canal, which is crucial for the country’s agricultural sustainability.

Agricultural experts emphasize that this project will empower farmers, enhance food security, and improve the economy by creating new employment opportunities. They urge stakeholders to prioritize national interest over provincial and regional politics to ensure maximum public benefit. Furthermore, they clarify that this project does not rely on Indus River water, dispelling misleading propaganda spread by certain elements for their vested interests. The Mahfooz Shaheed Canal is not just an irrigation initiative; it is a strategic step toward a more prosperous and food-secure Pakistan.