CHAPTER 4

Patriarchal Pakistan: Women’s Representation, Access to Resources, and Institutional Practices

Introduction

Pakistani society is strongly patriarchal in the way that women’s positions are mediated by *zar* (wealth), and *zamin* (land), and in the way that the degree of men’s honor depends on the possession and control of wealth, women, and land (*zar, zan, zamin*) (Haeri 2002: 36). Development policies that prioritize women’s integration and representation in institutions (WID), women’s access to resources (WAD), and transformation in institutional policies (GAD) have seldom been practiced in the public sector of Pakistan. As to the issue of the representation of women in the public sector, the chapter points out that while women work in all sectors of the economy, their representation in the public sector is abysmally low. This poor representation is despite constitutional and international guarantees, the recommendations of development agencies, and commissions set up by the state of Pakistan to look at the issue. It is due in part to the lack of a comprehensive government policy and program on the equitable representation of women in public sector organizations. Similar to many other developing nations affirmative action programs in Pakistan focus on ethnic and income inequalities rather than gender inequalities as such. This point has not received sufficient attention from researchers and academics, who invariably focus on the representation of women in political institutions. This chapter attempts to bridge the gap
by drawing parallels between the policies of representation in the political and public sector organizations to form the basis of research in the latter.

Similarly, as to the issue of women’s access to resources, which many feminists consider the main reason of gender inequality (England and Folbre 2005; Acker 2009; Kabeer 2009), there seems to be hardly any academic literature with reference to the public sector in developing countries. This chapter draws on the more general literature that has discussed the issue of women’s access to resources to form the basis of further research on this important issue in the context of the public sector of Pakistan. This highlights the point that women in the public sector face a basic issue of access to social, legal, material, and institutional resources. Lack of access to these resources and other resources such as childcare, accommodation, and transport contributes to work-life imbalances and puts a disproportionately higher burden on working women compared to working men. The chapter also highlights the point that lack of access to resources for women begins at birth in the form of the preferences for sons through to the demand for and supply of education and employment, in all of which women are discriminated against due to the functioning of the state, the family, and the society, which is patriarchal. Rather than being a driver of change through the equitable provision of resources to women, the public sector of Pakistan has been a preserver of the cultural values and traditions that form the basis of the structural disadvantage for women, with policies that deny the objective of gender equality.

The rules of the public sector that define the role of government employees in Pakistan do not mention gender equality or how that may be achieved. State social policies have a history of orthodoxy and political expediency, the continued practice of which has had grave social consequences for Pakistani women (Rashid 2009). It has not only lowered the status of women as citizens of the state but has also resulted in social violence against them in the form of rape, battering, and the denial of access to economic opportunities. Although the effects of state policies and the betrayal of institutions to women in society have been well researched, in the case of Pakistan there is a dearth of research on institutional polices on gender equality in the public sector.

The response of development agencies, with a notional commitment to gender equality, has been mixed. For example, the World Bank has prioritized the provision of education to both boys and girls (World Bank 2005) but has not focused on a change in public sector policies. The ADB