

# UNDERSTANDING DYNAMICS OF WOMAN SOCIAL ENTREPRENURSHIP: AN EXPLORATORY PRESPECTIVE

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to provide a better understanding on how Pakistani women entrepreneurs experience cultural and societal barriers in KP (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa), Pakistan, and how they confront those barriers as pioneering women entrepreneurs in such a conservative society. Furthermore, it focuses on the factors that motivate them to opt for entrepreneurship. A single unique case study of a strong pioneering KP woman entrepreneur has been selected by the researcher for this study through purposive sampling. The data is collected through semi-structured interview. Thematic analysis has been used to develop insights on how KP, Pakistani women business behaviors are determined by culture, family, religion and society institutionally. The theoretical framework of this study combines structuration with North's formal and informal institutions concept. The findings of the study offer some theoretical explanations for the role of institutions in a conservative context like KP. It also provides an insight to the drivers at work, and the challenges and constraints faced by the women of this society. It also highlights how these challenges are negotiated. Results also imply the role of entrepreneurship as emancipatory for women living in such strong conservative patriarchal culture.

### **Key Words**

Women social entrepreneurship, institutional theory, women empowerment, context

## INTRODUCTION

Women entrepreneurship is a growing global phenomenon and has attracted a lot of attention for the last few decades. However despite the attention and general increase in women entrepreneurial activities, women entrepreneurial talent remains untapped in most developing countries such as Pakistan. The aim of this study is to contribute to this hidden potential by highlighting the untold stories of courageous woman entrepreneurs from this context. The focus

is that owing to the complex interplay of socio cultural and economic factors, how does entrepreneurs like Miss F.S exercise agency to sustain and develop their enterprises, and also contribute in the lives of many other like them. It is important to note that the Pakistani society is diverse and holds contradictory views about women rights. Furthermore they don't have a clear definition of women rights, Therefore the subordination of women is prevalent through socio cultural norms and traditions that are being justified in different ways related to family, traditions and culture. Our research question relates to this and is focused on exploring how women constrained by certain gendered institutional structures exercise agency to sustain and develop their enterprise and also as a person. We also provide a view of the factors that might play a part in the process of negotiating those constraints for the entrepreneur.

### **REVIEW OF THE RELEVANT LITERATURE**

Women entrepreneurship is an emerging and growing phenomenon around the world (Jamali, 2009; Langowitz & Minniti, 2007; Zahra & Wright, 2015; Martinez Dy & Marlow, 2017). It not only contributes economically but also recognized as a source of increasing job creation, growth and women empowerment (Audretsch, Keilbach & Lehmann, 2006; McMullen & Warnick, 2016; Baumol, Litan, & Schramm, 2007). Despite its benefits, women entrepreneurial activities still remain low in most of the countries due to the socio-cultural pressures (Rehman & Roomi, 2008; Jamali, 2009). In Pakistan, women entrepreneurial talents and potential remains untapped due the societal culture and norms (Pakeeza, 2015; Qaisarani, Liaquat & Khokhar, 2016). Such norms are strongly associated with social prestige and male domination over women (Zaman, Stewart & Zaman, 2006; Mahmood, Sohail, Khalid & Babak, 2012). Hence, reduces the overall occupational choices available for women especially in KP Pakistan. Work life choices of women in Pakistan are constructed and reconstructed mostly according to their life circumstances (Rehman & Roomi, 2008). Women's life is continuously changing courses marriage, childbirth, increased home responsibilities, in some cases divorce. Such situation either creates hurdles or provides them with new ideas and opportunities.

Institutional theory is being utilized as a powerful theoretical lens for many entrepreneurial researches (Bruton et al., 2010; Gimenez & Calabro, 2017). While advances in women entrepreneurship nowadays are praiseworthy, the literature on women entrepreneurship and institutions is still considered fragmented (Gimenez & Calabro, 2017; Jennings & Brush, 2013). Over the year the term institution has been defined in many ways with substantial amount of variation (Dacin, 2002). It is traditionally concerned with how different groups and organizations working in a society can secure their legitimacy by conforming to the institutional environment of that particular area (Scott, 2008; Bruton et al., 2010). North in 1990 defined it as the rules of the game in a society (p. 3). The rules were said to be devised through interactions of humans.

Scott in 2008 famously formulized three categories of institutional forces that are regulatory, normative and cognitive. Regulatory forces stems directly from industrial agreements and standards and government legislations. These forces act as a guideline for entrepreneurial organizations. They lead to organizations and individual's compliance with laws. It also enforces

a reaction in case of non-compliance. The normative forces are based on obligatory models of individual and organizational behavior. They cover the dimensions of social, organizational and professional interaction. They are typically composed of norms and values of a particular society that defines the ground rules for an individual to conform. Normative forces can result in encouraging entrepreneurial behavior as well as discouraging it unknowingly most often. Finally the cognitive forces represent models of individuals' behavior subjectively based on constructed rules and meanings that ultimately result in limiting appropriate beliefs and actions. It also operates in terms of culture and language. It describes how societies accept and encourage entrepreneurship. It indicates values that can create cultural domain.

The new perspective of institutional theory suggests that diverse cultural rules cause the organizations to rationalize and adopt the new rules (Scott, 2008). Furthermore, these rules are adopted without questioning. These rules can be formal or informal. The formal rules are those that are mandatory and if organizations refuse to abide by them they can face formal sanctions. These formal institutions provide the regulatory frame (Welter, 2008; 2010), while the informal rules are for informal institutions which are created outside of official sanctioned channels such as norms, culture, gender specific formal institutions that include religion and traditions. Such rules shape the standing of women in a society (Welter, 2008; 2010). The cultural norms that determine the extent of female social entrepreneur's role include the general value that society attributes to women entrepreneurship and their family (Welter, 2008; Jennings & Brush, 2013). It is said that these roles can either play the role of pushing one towards entrepreneurship or it can act as a constraint. Important feature of institutional theory is that it focuses on cognitive-cultural aspects of institutions and the role of embedding the shared meaning. This theory is a departure from strict interpretations of organizations to the kind which accommodates and respects cultural norms and values (Mason et al., 2007). The roles that are ascribed to men and women are the result of manifesting gender in cultural norms, traditions and religion (informal institutions). This manifestation can influence the routes, extent, form and even success of women social entrepreneurs (Welter, 2008; 2010).

Women in Pakistan make their work life choices within a constrained socio cultural environment over their life course and such is the case of Miss F.S. Miss F.S is a proud single parent and a social entrepreneur. She was born into a noble and wealthy Pukhtun family. Her life was like a fairy tale at her parents' home but as soon as she got married, her life took a sharp turn that she never really imagined.

### **SETTING THE STAGE**

Miss F.S was born in 1988 into a rich notable Pukhtun family. She studied in prestigious institutions of Peshawar, Pakistan. After clearing A Levels she wanted to apply to University of London for LLB. She cleared ILETS with required marks but unfortunately she could not apply because of family and cultural restrictions. So, her dream of studying LLB in London did not come true and instead she applied to a local college for bachelors in economics and Law. She

was in her final year when her grandparents decided she should get engaged to a man who was ten years elder to her and a doctor by profession. He was the only son to his parents. Her grandparents did ask for Miss F.S's consent but she was expected to say yes. In Pukhtun society a girl's parents or grandparents can decide to whom she should get married on the behalf of the girl. They are thought to have more experience and knowhow of the society and people thus their decisions are thought to be more reliable. Some families do ask for the girls consent like Miss F.S's family but many do not think that is necessary. So according to Miss F.S her grandparents thought doctors are the best and safest choice for marriage. They are the only ones who can provide bread even in the time of recession.

Miss F.S got married at the age of 21 thinking that her life would be now "like a fairy tale" but she "was not aware that there was no happily ever after" for her. She got pregnant right after her marriage and during her third trimester she used to travel to Peshawar from Islamabad, Pakistan alone in order to appear for her final term exam. She stated that it was tough for her but she wanted to complete her degree for her child's future. Her married life was not going as well as expected and she noticed that her husband and in laws don't care about her. After she delivered her first child, a baby girl her mother in law named her after her late mother and Miss F.S had no say in that. With time, she noticed that her husband and in laws were not taking any responsibility of their grandchild. Miss F.S's in laws would ask her to afford the child's needs herself even though they knew that their son does not take any responsibility of his wife or the child. Miss F.S started to take financial help from her family without informing them about her situation. Furthermore, she took admission to study LLB in nearby university because she knew she needs to complete her education. It was very difficult for her to keep up with her study because of her family problems. Miss F.S's husband and in laws used to verbally attack her all the time. She and her daughter were not allowed to have lunch. The only meal they were allowed was dinner and that too was limited food in plate. She had to clean, scrub, open gates at midnight for her in laws coming from late night parties. This was not the life she imagined for herself. She cleared her first year LLB and was promoted to second year but she never made it pass that. Miss F.S's situation with her husband got out of control and her parents finally came to her rescue after they heard about her situation from a third party. Miss F.S always believed that if she continues tolerating her in laws, a day will come that her husband would realize his misgivings but that never happened. In 2014, after four years of marriage Miss F.S separated from her husband. This was the time when she made a promise to herself that she will never fail her daughter. Problems are part of life, thus, they are inevitable. Miss F.S decided to learn from them rather than ignoring them. She stopped asking for financial help from her family. She had jewels worth millions at the time of her marriage, most of them were taken by her mother in law after her wedding insisting that it's a custom in their family. She was left with some jewelry that worth 1.5 million Pakistani rupees (10,746 \$). She sold that jewelry and invested the money in her aunt's gym which ended up as a struggle in itself. It's hard for the people of the Pashtun society to accept a Women's Gym. She faced a hard time getting women and their families to trust her and the Gym. Their families thought that there might be cameras installed in the Gym,

and in the changing rooms and such a situation could result in serious consequences. Miss F.S stated that it took her a long time to convince people to trust her. With time her clientele increased and the business started generating profits. Miss F.S reinvested those profits and started a stitching Centre in the area. She arranged exhibitions with the help of friends in order to promote her stitching Centre. By the end of 2015, Miss F.S had enough money to buy shares at her aunt's renowned beauty salon in the area. Such achievements motivated Miss F.S and she felt confident and content. Later on, Peshawar Development Authority (PDA) passed a regulation and Miss F.S was asked to shift her setup to a commercial area otherwise she will be penalized. At the time, she was dealing with this issue; her husband came back in her life begging for her to return. This time he accepted his mistakes and promised that he will pay back for everything she and her daughter suffered if she gets back with him. Miss F.S states that being a young single working mother in a Pukhtun society is the worst situation of all and has a certain stigma attached to it. In her society divorce is associated with dishonor and shame. Miss F.S wanted to do well by her daughter so Miss F.S believed her husband for the sake of their daughter and went back with him leaving behind everything she achieved at her aunt's disposal. Sadly, it did not work between them and after few months they separated again and this time it was permanent. Miss F.S returned to her business and started working with more dedication and commitment. During her journey towards success she met her godmother, a family friend, who was the same age as her mother. She was observing Miss F.S for some time and seeing her commitment and dedication she offered Miss F.S to join her in social work.

She started attending office with her godmother, her organization was known as Volunteer Pakistan Girl Guides Association (PGGA). In a few days, she became a girl guide (Young Leader) working with government school underprivileged girl guides of Peshawar Pakistan. Miss F.S soon started arranging free of cost skill classes for those underprivileged girls, such as beautician courses, computer learning, stitching and block printing classes. Her plan was to teach girl guides vocational skills, and then provide them with small work contracts at Ms. F.S stitching Centre and in return they were being paid a handsome amount. This way their skills were polished, and they were able to generate income. Miss F.S states that for the first time in her life she felt content after helping those girls. Seeing the smile on the faces of those girls gave Miss F.S the strength she needed. Now she was able to sleep peacefully at night.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Qualitative studies relate with exploring new ideas, facts and theories. Since the women social entrepreneurship has hardly been touched upon in KP Pakistan, there is a tremendous amount of theories and knowledge and empirical data to be explored here. This justifies the use of qualitative methodology. Qualitative approach is considered to be the best one as it facilitates exploration using different sources within its context (Merriam, 1998). The researcher is also interested in context related to the case and the researcher is not clear about the boundaries of the phenomenon and context (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009).

Robson (2002, p.178) defines **case study** as “a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence”. Single case study approach has been used by the researcher. It’s better to use single case study approach when the case is unique and critical (Yin, 2009). It provides you with an opportunity to observe and analyze a phenomenon that has not been considered by many. Purposive sampling was deployed as that allows researcher to think critically and choose such a case that related to the population parameters under study (Silverman, 2008). The data has been collected through semi-structured in-depth interview. The interview lasted for 150 mins. The gained information was then analyzed through thematic analysis. This resulted in consolidated model of Female social entrepreneurial drivers, issues, barriers, and challenges.

## **QUALITATIVE EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE**

### **ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND**

In December 2015, an executive meeting of Girls Guides Association was held at Islamabad, capital of Pakistan. Miss F.S was representing her province Khyber Pukhtunkhawa (KP). In that meeting representatives of Girls Guides Association from all over Pakistan were gathered to share the work they have been doing in their respective province. Miss F.S presented the efforts being done by the association for women in Peshawar, KP despite the sensitive situation of their province. Her presentation was highly appreciated by the entire council and as a result Miss F.S was elected as Chairperson Young Leader of Pakistan and she has been fulfilling her responsibilities as Chairperson till date (2018). She was sent on numerous assignments by her association to Nepal and China where she had the opportunity to speak for the Girls Guide struggle in Pakistan. Soon she started getting recognition on multiple forums. She became the member of Women Chamber of Commerce & Industry (WCCIP) KP events in Peshawar, Pakistan. Local channels started calling her for interviews. Miss F.S was aware of the media’s power and wanted to utilize this opportunity for good, but she was discouraged by her family as it’s against the norms of Pashtun society for a woman to appear on social media. This didn’t stop Miss F.S from appearing on media. She believed this was a perfect platform for her to speak on behalf of all women.

Miss F.S always believed in following her dreams. Now at the age of 28 she is handling her business very well. Apart from that Miss F.S pays special attention towards grooming her daughter. She is playing the role of a mother as well as of a father at the same time. Miss F.S plans to provide her daughter with everything that she is been missing. Now she takes her daughter around the world, gives her all of the love and attention and most importantly talks to her about her dreams. She has finally shifted her stitching centre/boutique (Al-Kamash by S&T) to commercial area. These days she is raising funds for deaf and mute girl guides enrolled in schools by her Association. These funds will be utilized in covering the medical expenses of the deaf and mute girls. Miss F.S is also teaching them skills for survival. Getting outside of her own

world of sorrows Miss F.S realized that the problems she faced are nothing compared to what her surrounding society is suffering from. Miss F.S's father used to discourage her in the start of her venture due to societal insecurities but now he also acknowledges the impact of her efforts. Lately Miss F.S has started a local magazine "Good Morning Pakistan". Seeing the talented youth of Peshawar motivated Miss F.S to do something productive for them. Hence, she started this magazine to promote all the local hidden talent and new businesses of Peshawar. More than 7000 copies of the magazine are published and delivered. It's free of cost and provides youngsters with a platform to promote themselves.

Miss F.S is hopeful that her struggle for Pukhtun women will continue. She is thankful to the people in her life, her husband and in-laws included as they made her who she is today. Challenges are part of her life and now she welcomes them with confidence. She believes that challenges motivate her. It's a struggle Pukhtun women inherited when born in this neck of the woods.

### **ORGANIZING THEMES: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES**

From Miss F.S perspective, she faced following managerial issues.

1. Gaining customers trust was a challenge in the start. Women hesitated to join the gym because their husbands and families thought it was not safe. They thought there will be cameras installed in the changing rooms and the footage can be used against them. Such rumors made it hard for Miss F.S to gather a good number of cliental. With time people realized that Miss F.S is a genuine working woman and they can trust her establishment.
2. In 2015, Miss F.S faced a major challenge when Peshawar Development Authority (PDA) sent her notice to shift her business from residential to commercial area, if not, her centre will be closed down and penalized. This was a difficult situation for the Miss F.S because the same time her ex-husband also returned and begged her to take him back. At one side, it was her business and on the other she had to make a decision for her daughter's sake. Dealing with two major problems created many difficulties for her but ultimately, she moved had to move her setup to commercial area.
3. Relocation resulted in further challenges such as attracting new cliental, informing the previous clients about new location and adjustment in the new environment.

### **ORGANIZING THEMES: SOCIAL ENTREPRENURSHIP DRIVERS AND BARRIERS**

#### **A) Drivers**

##### **1. Personal Traits**

Miss F.S is an ambitious, courageous, aspiring, compassionate and a dignified woman. She suffered from a terrible married life. She continued her education after her marriage and is still enrolled in LLB program. She sold her wedding

jewelry and did not ask anyone for financial help when she was starting her own business. She learns from the challenges she faces, unlike some who gets discouraged in such situations. She showed great courage and bravery dealing with her family matters and societal norms. She is a proud single mother and has created an example that young women of Pukhtun society could reflect upon.

## **2. Support from friends and family**

Traditionally, In Pakistan and KP, Women are dependent on the support of the family, friends and other important people in their lives while deciding for their future. Miss F.S unfortunately did not have much support from immediate family in the start. Her husband was neither interested in her nor their daughter. She suffered a great deal during her married life. Her parents were also against her initiative because they did not understand the need for such venture. Furthermore, they were afraid of what society will think and say about them. Miss F.S credits her godmother a lot in her support during the difficult years. She showed her the real way to achieve peace. Miss F.S's closest friends also helped her in her venture by arranging exhibitions or attracting different cliental. Thus, this support system really motivated Miss F.S throughout her journey. She is extremely thankful for such people in her life and she always credits them.

## **3. Collaboration with Government**

Miss F.S is working as chairperson at Pakistan Girls Guides Association (PGGA) which has status of a national organization since 1961. The association is protected by Government of Pakistan. It actually emerged on the world map in 1948 when it became full member of the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS). Miss F.S has been sent to numerous countries to represent Pakistani women on multiple forums. In addition to that Miss F.S is a member of Women Chamber of Commerce & Industry (WCCIP). WCCIP is a government registered organization working for the women in KP. It's the voice of business women entrepreneurs. WCCIP is dedicated for the welfare of women entrepreneurs that are facing economic and societal challenges.

## **4. Focus on Growth and Sustainability**

Miss F.S continuously reinvested incoming profits, first she invested in a Ladies gym with her aunt, then she started a stitching centre which led to a boutique known as Al-Kamash by S&T, worked on several government projects and lately she started a magazine "Good Morning Pakistan" that promotes hidden talent of Peshawar. She was focused on growth and sustainability of her organization. A successful and sustainable social enterprise needs ambitious goals and focus on growth and development.

## **5. Social Work**

Miss F.S stated that seeing the smile on the faces of the underprivileged girls she meets and helps gave Miss F.S the strength she needed and now she is able to



sleep peacefully at night. She also stated that helping these women made her realize the true purpose of her life. Despite her parent's disapproval Miss F.S appeared on numerous media shows and spoke on the behalf of those women who are suffering from multiple problems. Working for these women gave Ms. F.S hope that she can do something better with her life, something that can have a long-lasting impact on the Pakistani society. She finally realized her power to create a difference and that is what motivates her every time when society tries to judge her.

## **B) Barriers**

### **1. Lack of Support from Immediate Family in the Start**

In Pukhtun society women are dependent on the men in their life and their support matters in one's future decisions. Unfortunately, Miss F.S's parents were not in the favor of her venture in the start. Her in-laws never really cared about her or her daughter, nor did her husband. Their lack of support used to affect Miss F.S emotionally but she survived it with courage. Miss F.S's dedication for the cause made her parents change their perspective about working women and now they are supportive of her in many ways.

### **2. Patriarchal Culture**

In the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, women encounter patriarchy both in public and private sector of life. They have low socio-economic status as compared to men in this society. The society treats them as inferior to men and it is justified by religion and culture. This kind of culture always creates hurdles for Pakistani women. Working her way up, Miss F.S experienced this cultural barrier on multiple forums and it continuously tried to slow her down.

### **3. Societal Norms**

According to Pukhtun societal norms, divorce is associated with dishonor and shame. A woman will rather suffer and continuously compromise with her married life situations rather than opting for a divorce. A woman working with men, appearing on media and working outside of homes such behavior is not socially acceptable. In situations like these, it was really difficult for Miss F.S to continue working for her dreams. These societal norms also affected her parent's thoughts and resulted in lack of support from them on many occasions.

### **4. Trust issues**

Miss F.S faced some trust issues in the start. People were not sure about the privacy arrangements of her setup because of prior bad experience at other such businesses. In addition to that societal norms also had an effect on them. Her cliental had reservations about coming to the gym but with time that cleared out.

### **5. Being Young Single Mother**

Being a young single parent in Pukhtun society is not something common and is stigmatized. Divorces are considered extremely outrageous due to which women mostly

compromise on their situation rather than opting for a divorce as a solution. Miss F.S has been through this critical time with courage and has been a powerful example for the society. She cares about her daughter and as every mother she wants the best for her. She has to play the role of father and mother both. She wants the society to respect her daughter and for that she is continuously fighting for women rights. Being a single mother she continuously tries to achieve a balance between work and her daughter and she has been great in achieving that balance so far.

#### **6. Lack of Awareness about Rules and Regulations/ Rules and Regulations are Complicated**

Miss F.S lacks awareness about the rules and regulation of SME in Pakistan. According to the law she cannot have a business setup at home as that is not a commercial area. Her lack of awareness created serious complications for her and she had to move her whole setup. It is also implied here that rules are so complicated neither Miss F.S nor government agency (PDA) realized that it's against the law, as she had a business setup at home for two years.

#### **Conclusion**

The researcher examined how a woman despite the restrictions of tradition, culture and societal pressure became an entrepreneur. Entrepreneurship played an emancipatory role in the life of Miss F.S. Women as Miss F.S are role models who are playing a great role in changing society. Her story shows a pattern of actions and rules to follow, which resulted in a modified structure for other women of her community to follow. In response to the recent calls for more in-depth researches on women entrepreneurship, our interpretive approach of the case study advances the understanding of the social phenomenon in women entrepreneurship literature (Creswell, 2017). Our core contribution lies in the interpretive account of our respondent, which has been missing in previous studies (Henry et al., 2016).

Pakistan is an Islamic country and family is an important social construct in the life of Muslims. It has a collectivist culture due to which women career choices depend upon the joint approval of the family. Before marriage the decisions about women are determined by her parents, mainly the patriarch of the family and after marriage that authority is transferred to the husband. Therefore, they don't get to live an independent life unless their family is supportive of their life choices and believes in their independence. These results are consistent with the study of Jennings and Brush (2013) where they argue that a women's capacity to exercise agency are sort of embedded in their family life. In Miss F.S case, the greatest hurdle she faced in her life was due to the men in her life, who did not believe in her talent and her dreams. She was confined to an obligatory role which continuously tried to hinder her independence but instead of letting that role imprison her, she fought back and turned that confinement into opportunity for her benefit. The more the society tried to stop her, the more powerful she became and now she is an inspiration for the younger generation of KP women who are trying to follow in her footsteps.

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