Women Empowerment: From Dream to Reality

By Farzana Raja (Hilal-e-Imtiaz)

It is truly a matter of immense pride and satisfaction to me that Pakistan has made quite vital inroads in the cause of women empowerment and emancipation during last few years. Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) is one of the largest interventions in the social sector of Pakistan. This breakthrough has special significance to me because the programme has not only laid the foundations for sustainable poverty reduction but also been able to change the hearts and minds of the people in general regarding status of women in our society.

While marking International Women’s Day, I would like to recall that mainstreaming of women and their socio-economic uplift was envisaged as one of the prime objectives of BISP at the very beginning of this unique initiative in the social sector besides poverty alleviation. We as a nation are grateful to Mohtarma Fatima Jinnah, Begum Rana Liaquat Ali Khan and Mother of Democracy Lady Nusrat Bhutto who played significant role in the women empowerment... Inspired by the dynamic leadership and vision of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto, the programme was designed to achieve the desired goals through empowering women folks of society.

There is no denying of this reality that women empowerment is a key phenomenon of bringing about sustainable socio-economic progress of every nation or society. This forward-looking approach is helping such societies to get fully benefited from the active participation of women from every walk of life.

It is also worth watching that the women today are more aware of their role, existence and rights than ever before.
International Women’s Day has equally special significance for Women of Pakistan that have made an epic struggle to protect and safeguard the rights of millions of voiceless women of our society. Some historic achievements have been made during this momentous struggle but still there is a long way to go uplift the status of women in society further.

During recent years, some landmarks have been achieved regarding protection of the rights of women. It is quite an encouraging advancement to achieve the ultimate fruits of women empowerment and emancipation as it was envisioned by the Father of the Nation, Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah. Our great Quaid was of view that “No nation can ever be worthy of its existence that cannot take its women along with the men. No struggle can ever succeed without women participating side by side with men.”

The history of Pakistan is evident of the fact that it was the democratic government of Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto that had revived the vision of Jinnah in its true spirit by taking practical measures to protect rights of women and by making the welfare of women an integral part of social, political and economic reforms.

Later, after a long era of tyranny in which women of the country suffered the most, Shaheed Benazir Bhutto introduced various women-friendly policies to revive their status in society and to reduce their socio-economic hardships. She was indeed an ardent believer of women right and empowerment and thus served the cause of women by making it foundation stone of the policies of her government.

The commitment of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto for the cause of women has always been a great source of inspiration for me. The first ever Ministry of Women in Federal cabinet was also introduced our Shaheed leader. Besides, she introduced several revolutionary policies aiming to empower women of the country.

While highlighting the significance of women empowerment, Shaheed Benazir Bhutto once said that “Empowerment is the right to be economically independent”. Empowerment is the right to be educated and make choices. Empowerment is the right to have the opportunity to select a career. Empowerment is the right to own property, to start a business, to flourish in the marketplace.” Today
BISP, through its multi-pronged poverty reduction and women empowerment strategy has incorporated this entire vision of Shaheed BB in the form of its different components i.e. Waseela-e-Haq, Waseela-e-Rozgar, Waseela-e-Taleem as well as health and life insurance covering millions of beneficiary families with women as primary recipients.

In the pursuit of same vision of Shaheed leader, the PPP led democratic government, during its constitutional era of five years, has introduced number of new laws aiming to protect and safeguard the rights of women. The women of Pakistan are still facing with a number of challenges, however, it is being anticipated that the negative societal behaviors and anti-women mindset would finally get defeated with the collaborative dedicated efforts at various levels.

Benazir Income Support Programme as a comprehensive social safety net has played most vital and much needed role in enhancing the cause of women socio-economic uplift and empowerment. By virtue of making women heads of the family prime beneficiaries, this initiative has been proved s a giant leap and this fact has won the recognition from credible international organizations all over the world.

Thank God, more than 1.5 million women have obtained their Computerized National Identity Card (CNIC) during last four years only to be eligible to get registered with BISP as beneficiary of the programme. BISP is determine to give women their lost identity in the future development of Pakistan.

International Women’s Day provide us a chance of re-evaluating our endeavors for empowering women of the country and to further re-established our commitment with the cause of uplifting the status of women in our society.

INSHALLAH, Pakistan will emerge as a responsible welfare state of the modern era…

*Specially written article on the occasion of International Women’ Day (IWD)

* The writer is Federal Minister and Chairperson Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP)