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## **Gender Neutrality and the Pakistani Bureaucracy**

By Maryam Tanwir<sup>1</sup>

### **Abstract**

Pakistan inherited the British Weberian model at its birth in 1947 (Braibanti, 1966). The Weberian framework is the basis of the professional code of the Pakistani bureaucracy. The Framework highlights the importance of gender neutrality towards ensuring impartiality, promotion of merit and efficiency in organizations. The Pakistani bureaucracy has been categorized as being Weberian by recent research, and hence should be gender neutral. This paper examines if the Pakistani bureaucracy is indeed gender neutral. It inspects the gender norms prevalent in the context of the macro sociocultural environment in Pakistan and finds that these norms are reflected in women's position in the bureaucracy. Using the perceptions of male and female bureaucrats and ministers as symptomatic evidence, the research deliberates on how the socially determined status hierarchies interact with organizational rules and regulations to perpetuate gender bias and lack of gender neutrality within the bureaucracy. The paper concludes by reinforcing that the bureaucracy operates in a larger social and cultural environment, which is unable to be a socially transformative agent in the case of Pakistan, and hence, is not gender neutral and by consequence, not Weberian.

*Key Words:* women, bureaucracy, Pakistan, organizations, social construction.

### **Introduction**

The Weberian framework is considered to be the basis of the professional code of the Pakistani bureaucracy, having inherited the colonial British Weberian model at its birth in 1947 (Braibanti, 1966). Weber (1968) stressed the importance of gender neutrality towards ensuring impartiality, promotion of merit and efficiency in organizations. In their influential work on bureaucracies, Evans and Rauch (1999) characterized the Pakistani bureaucracy to be Weberian. By this logic, the Pakistani bureaucracy should be gender neutral.

This paper is premised on the hypothesis that Pakistan inherited the Weberian bureaucracy,<sup>2</sup> its bureaucracy recently rated as highly Weberian by Rauch and Evans (1999). The article examines the prevalence of gender neutrality in the bureaucracy in Pakistan and is organized into the following sections: The first Section sets out the concept of gender neutrality in organizations and the next examines Weberian notions of gender neutrality in bureaucracies. In particular, it sets out Weber's ideal type of bureaucracy characterized by a 'gender blindness', free from patriarchal social and cultural norms and biases. It also reiterates Evans and Rauch's

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<sup>2</sup> which is meritocratic and gender neutral

(1999) findings for the Pakistani bureaucracy and thus, sets up the central hypothesis of this essay viz. that the Pakistani bureaucracy is Weberian and gender neutral.

The following Section discusses the role and behaviour of women in organizations drawing from the vast literature in feminist studies, sociology, economics and organizational theory. This is followed by an examination of gender norms in the context of the macro-socio cultural environment in Pakistan, finding that its norms are reflected in women's positions in the bureaucracy. The subsequent section introduces qualitative field data collected by the author and examines the empirical evidence on the gender neutrality of the Pakistani bureaucracy.

The next section using the perceptions of the bureaucrats as symptomatic evidence deliberates on how socially determined status hierarchies interact with organizational rules and regulations to perpetuate gender bias and lack of gender neutrality within the bureaucracy. It then situates these findings within the larger feminist literature on organizational theory. It then debates on how socially determined status hierarchies interact with organizational rules and regulations. An analysis is constructed on how organizations adapt to social prejudice and deal with women, and the corresponding behaviour of women adapting to political organization is examined. The proceeding section informs on the consequences of the gender bias.

In the conclusion, the Pakistani bureaucracy is found to be lacking in the concept and practice of gender neutrality and is instead determined to be a patriarchal organization. The essay concludes by reinforcing that the bureaucracy operates in a larger social and cultural environment, which is unable to be a socially transformative agent in the case of Pakistan, and hence, is not gender neutral and by consequence, not Weberian, thereby contradicting the central hypothesis of those who argue that the Weberian model is indeed the model of the Pakistani bureaucracy.

### **Gender neutrality**

For the purpose of this article, gender neutrality implies that there is no distinction among bureaucrats on the basis of gender. This suggests that government officers of different sexes are to be viewed with a gender neutral lens. Thus to imply that an organization is in fact gendered, means that advantages and disadvantage, exploitation and control, actions and emotions, meaning and identity all are seen through a lens that distinguishes between male and female (Ely et.al, 2003).

### ***Weber and gender neutrality***

Weber (1968) theorized that a rational, efficient and achievement-oriented bureaucracy must emphasize objective standards and impersonal rules which would ensure organizational reliability and predictability. This entails objective, independent and impersonal decision-making, without the influence of bias, prejudice, self-interest, or external pressure that would ensure the most optimum decisions. These would ultimately produce an organization that is optimally efficient and technically superior.

Weber emphasized that such organizations operate more efficiently than other systems of administration, to the extent that they 'depersonalize' the execution of official tasks (Bendix, 1960). Depersonalizing would signify that the official is free from the restraints of gender.

The Weberian framework simply does not have a gender dimension. The defining features of the Weberian bureaucrat being legal and rational leave no room for socially constructed markers such as gender or race or ethnicity. For Weber, bureaucratic authority

depended on the specifics of the post and not on the individual: it was not contingent on the variation of sex; both sexes were to be recruited through the same examination and were to work following the same sets of rules and regulations. In Weber's ideal type of bureaucracy, women would not be discriminated against; there would be no bias for or against women or men, because Weber's ideal bureaucracy is contingent on defined skills and qualifications that have no consideration for gender. It can be inferred that the Weberian framework is gender neutral due to its depersonalized nature. Consequently the bureaucracy is gender neutral and there is no gain being a man and no loss being a woman.

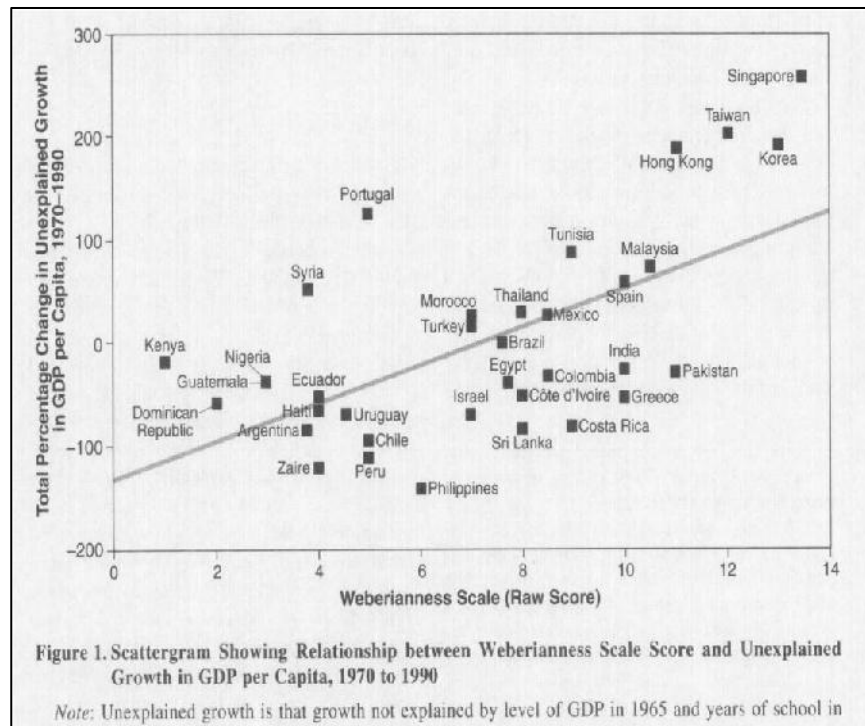
What gives further strength to his concept of gender neutrality is the fact that Weber designed the bureaucracy as being in opposition to the then current traditional practices in operation. Previously, traditional, monarchic, hereditary and feudal methods were used to hold on to power and authority. Then social, cultural and religious notions governed the majority, and Weber's rational organization promised a departure from this route. Bureaucracy as a sharp contrast promised to be fair, rational and progressive, free from the prevalent social and cultural norms and biases. The bureaucracy was to break away from these traditions and within the workplace be a separate and a distinct system from the social milieu outside. Theoretically, at least, all were to be equal before bureaucratic laws, men and women, with no bias or prejudice permeating the bureaucratic system.

For the purpose of this research I use recent analysis by Evans & Rauch (1999, 2000) who have worked extensively on the relationship between bureaucracy, and growth and have classified countries on their level of "Weberianness" (heretofore written without parenthesis). Drawing on the original insights of Weber, Evans & Rauch (1999, 2000) argue that replacement of a patronage system for state officials by a professional state bureaucracy is a necessary (though not sufficient) condition for a state to be developmental<sup>3</sup>. They collect a data set from 35 countries, construct a Weberian scale and test the data with respect to economic growth. The Weberian features they test against are meritocratic recruitment and predictable long-term career ladders. On the basis of their research results they conclude that state bureaucracies characterized by meritocratic recruitment and predictable rewarding career ladders are associated with higher growth rates. In their research paper Pakistan ranks high on the Weberian scale.

As illustrated in Figure 1 they classify Pakistan as being relatively Weberian and give it a high raw Weberian score.

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<sup>3</sup> The key institutional characteristics of what they label 'Weberian bureaucracy' include meritocratic recruitment through competitive examinations, civil service procedures for hiring and firing rather than political appointments and dismissals, and filling higher levels of the hierarchy through internal promotion. They conclude that meritocratic recruitment is the element of bureaucratic structure that is the most important for improving bureaucratic performance; internal promotion and career stability are of secondary importance.



**Figure 1: Relationship between Weberianness scale and unexplained growth**

### Gender neutrality and organizations

Having set out the concept of gender neutrality, this section introduces literature on the roles and behaviours of women in organizations. It focuses on the findings of three organizational sociologists who have examined these roles and behaviours.

Focusing on major feminist critiques of the Weberian model as gender neutral, Kanter (1977), one of the most influential organizational sociologists, a neo-Weberian, in her seminal work *Men and women of the organization*, puts forth her analysis regarding the behaviour of men and women in an organization. She offers an explicit and comprehensive account of corporate life, and her analysis can be extended to other bureaucratic organizations.<sup>4</sup> Kanter repudiates the prevalence of gender neutrality in the bureaucracy. For her a Weberian Bureaucracy is quintessentially a masculine entity. She confirms in her research that the hierarchal structure of the bureaucracy negatively affects the women who are underrepresented whom she labels as 'Tokens'. She informs that non-rational factors influence decisions and perceptions, and the informal structures within the bureaucracy ostracize women who do not have power or authority. On the basis interviews Kanter conducted of the women, their colleagues, and their superiors, Kanter categorized the experiences of women in three main themes.

The first theme was higher visibility of women: because there were fewer women, they were more visible, hence creating performance pressures. Secondly she talks of the isolation, or ostracizing the women felt from the informal networks and groups that pervade the organization. And thirdly Kanter ascribed that the women were encapsulated into gender-stereotyped roles,

<sup>4</sup> Kanter (1977) writes ethnography of an organization. She conducts a case study consisting of 20 saleswomen in a 300-person sales force at a multinational, Fortune 500 corporation, Indsco.

where women were expected to behave in gender defined ways. She introduces the concept of tokenism, where a token is the minority group, less than 15% of the work force, and how this token, in a group can affect one's performance due to enhanced visibility and performance pressures.

Kanter (1977) informs that women behave much differently from men in organizations. The reason for this behavior is that women in an organization do not have access to power and authority; they are generally placed on relatively unimportant and low profile positions, which are devoid of power. So women have problem of powerlessness, and this powerlessness reinforces the subordinate role of the women. Kanter attributes women with performance pressures, social isolation, and role encapsulation which are inevitably the consequences of disproportionate numbers of men and women in an organization.<sup>5</sup> According to Kanter (1977), the structural composition of the workplace influences the interaction between dominants and tokens.

Kanter observes:

‘While organizations were being defined as sex-neutral machines, masculine principles were dominating their authority structures’ (Kanter, 1977: 46)

Kanter's research has been influential for other organizational sociologists, her insights have been replicated, and her work is considered important in the development of a theory of a behavior in organizations which can be generalizable to most other social systems (Bluedorn, 1980). Consequently the current research will attempt to replicate Kanter's findings and extend them in the case of the Pakistani bureaucracy. The research draws on Kanter's findings of higher visibility, isolation and gender stereotyping to measure the Pakistani bureaucracy by this yardstick.

The second organizational sociologist is Wajcman (1988), and her research has surveyed the role of women in five multinational organizations; her findings reinforce Kanter's (1977) dictate that gender neutrality in organization maybe assumed but is not realized. In her book *Managing Like a Man*<sup>6</sup> she takes a critical look at men and women's experiences, and challenges the assumption of gender neutrality in managerial work. The book aptly illustrates that occupations, which are assumed to be gender neutral, have profoundly gendered characters, from which women are largely excluded. A key argument of the book is that management incorporates a male standard that positions women out of place. And the construction of women is different from men is one of the mechanisms whereby male power in the workplace is maintained (Wajcman, 1988). Her research is on the ‘masculine’ organizational culture that inevitably sexualizes women, and bars them from positions of power and senior management. She concludes that management is all about power, power remains a ‘guy thing,’ and the institutions of work are gendered male. She reinforces Kanter's (1977) assertion that the bureaucracy is a male entity. She further argues that the organizational constraints and not individual personality traits determine management style. The entry to senior levels is dependent upon the possession of appropriate cultural capital and related access to informal networks, processes that are themselves gendered.

She concludes that:

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<sup>5</sup> Tokenism implies the numeric skewedness of one's work group.

<sup>6</sup> which is based on survey data and interviews, from 108 women and 216 men managers in five multinational corporations, which supposedly had exemplary equal opportunity policies and gender equality policies

‘The institutions of work, not just people, must be understood as substantively gendered’ (Wajcman, 1988:158)

The gender difference is the basis for the unequal distribution of power and resources; men are constructed as the universal standard, and it is women who are marked as gendered, the ones who are different, the inferior *other*. She argues that for women to achieve positions of power they will have to accommodate themselves to the organization, sacrifice their gender identity and manage like a man. Although no such sacrifice is demanded from men. Far from patenting a new feminine management style, women generally ‘manage like a man’ to succeed. For the purpose of this essay Wajcman’s (1988) dictate that ‘power is a man prerogative’ will be used as a yardstick to assess the prevalence of gender neutrality in the Pakistani bureaucracy.

Another powerful critique against the prevalence of gender neutrality in the bureaucracy comes from the ‘The feminist case against bureaucracy’ by Ferguson (1984).<sup>7</sup> Ferguson (1984) utilizes Foucault’s work to make her case against bureaucracy. Foucault perceives the institutions of modern administered life as tyrannical and views the bureaucracy as a totalitarian system, finding women less embedded in the linguistic and institutional structures of the bureaucratic society and consequently, less indoctrinated into its practices. Women then have subjugated knowledges and can prove subversive (Donavon, 2006) Taking her theoretical perspective from Foucault, not only does Ferguson (1984) dispute the fact that gender neutrality in the bureaucracy existws, but recommends that bureaucracy should be obliterated and new forms of organization, more inclined towards feminine ways, should be established. The bureaucratic institution, she argues, itself is a masculine entity, embedded in and built upon a masculine concept of relationships, including hierarchy. She argues that a Weberian bureaucracy is therefore by definition a masculine one. Bureaucracy is quintessentially patriarchal, and its foundation is gendered male. Her alternative is the creation of a feminine bureaucracy, based on concepts of conciliation, cooperation, and compromise, rather than top-down authority. Her work is based on interviews with twenty employees and clients of the bureaucrats.

Her analysis relating to women is that

‘Members of bureaucratic society are embedded within a political situation similar in many respects to that in which women traditionally find themselves, and are subject to a parallel set of forces and pressures through which subordination is created and maintained (Ferguson 1984:83).

The main point of her feminization of bureaucracy argument is that the political consequences of male dominance, ensures that women learn the role of the subordinate, and this role can become self-perpetuating. The skills that one learns in order to cope with secondary status then reinforce that status. Her message is that women are not powerless because they are feminine; rather they are feminine because they are powerless, because it is a way of dealing with the requirements of subordination. (Ferguson 1984: 95)

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<sup>7</sup> Ferguson’s work is undoubtedly an important contribution to the development of feminist organizational analysis and is still widely cited and referred to as being a ‘magnificent feminist attack on bureaucracy’ (Mills & Tancred, 1992:6).

Her fascinating conclusion about feminization is that it is the structural complement of domination. She claims that as long as one group of people are concerned with maintaining and exercising power, the other group will of necessity be primarily concerned with coping with the power held over them. For Ferguson (1984) the alternative to bureaucracy is provided by the radical feminist theory where society should be based on injunctions of egalitarianism, and she recommends that for women to attain gender equality, there should be pursuit of the development of parallel women-centric organizations which have attributes of, participatory collectivism, power sharing, non-threatening, non-hierarchical, which are all based on more feminine values, which will all lead to banishing the bureaucracy. And she maintains that nothing less than the elimination of bureaucracies will truly allow women to get empowered.<sup>8</sup>

This research therefore formulates a yardstick which is three-pronged, drawing on the analytical frameworks of Kanter (1977), Wajcman (1988) and Ferguson (1984). My framework of enquiry is thus a lens through which to view the Pakistani bureaucracy. Qualitative interviews from female and male bureaucrats will be examined through these three dimensions. The following segment examines the empirical evidence relating to the gender norms in the Pakistani bureaucracy commencing with an analysis of gender norms in the context of the macro socio-cultural environment in Pakistan.

### **Gender and Pakistan**

This segment elaborates on gender differences between men and women in Pakistan; it focuses on the various dimensions of social and cultural discrimination and then thread these biases into the Pakistani bureaucracy.

It would be a fair assumption that bureaucracies function in a larger environment; it is the Environment that determines the status of the individuals. The patriarchal element prevalent in the sociocultural environment modifies the degree of gender neutrality. This patriarchal element is even more pronounced in south Asia. It would be safe to say that south Asia is one of the least gender sensitive regions in the world. The subordinate role of women, their secondary position as dictated by the social and cultural prejudice against women, further perpetuates gender inequality in the bureaucracy in these countries. This has been reinforced by Joseph (1996) who finds that the persistence of patriarchy in the Arab world, and other regions, is an obstacle for women, children, families, and states. It has an adverse effect on health, education, labour, human rights, and democracy.

In Pakistan, contrary to notions of gender-neutral, non-feminist critiques of Weberian dictates, gender shapes the order of hierarchy and power in bureaucracies. The subordinate role of women is illustrated very clearly in the case of Pakistan, where in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2013, Pakistan has been allotted the second lowest ranking in the report's overall measure of gender-based biases. Pakistan ranked 124 on women's health

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<sup>8</sup> The feminist literature though influential and convincing is not without criticism, Kanter (1977) has been criticized on failing to recognize how inequalities are built into gender relations, assuming that bureaucracy is neutral and is unconnected from broader social and historical processes. Similarly Ferguson (1984) has been criticized for giving an essentializing account of women (Witz & Savage, 1992). Although Ferguson's (1984) insights are fascinating but her recommendation to create an alternative to bureaucracy on feminine lines maybe a huge challenge, and for that women will need to be in a decision making, authoritative position, which according to Kanter men do not allow them to occupy.



and survival, 129 on women's educational attainment and 135 with respect to equal economic participation and opportunity.<sup>9</sup>

The status of women is not homogenous throughout the social and economic terrains of Pakistan; there exists diversity on the status and role of women, but generally it has been observed in Pakistan that women's rights to inheritance, education, employment, and political rights, are considerably lower compared to that of men. The social construction in Pakistan is predominantly patriarchal. Consequently, the sense of worth of women, determined by their own perceptions and those of others, is lower compared to of a man's sense of self-worth.

Women are seen to succumb to subordination, which is dictated by the forces of patriarchy across classes, regions, and the rural/urban divide. Though the spread of patriarchy is not even or uniform throughout, the ADB (2000) reports that the Patriarchal structures are relatively stronger in the rural and tribal setting where local customs establish male authority and power. Women are frequently exchanged, sold, and bought in marriages. Additionally women are provided with limited opportunities to create choices that allow them to change the realities of their lives. It is also observed that women belonging to the upper and middle classes have greater access to education and employment opportunities and can therefore sometimes assume greater control over their lives (ADB, 2000). In Baluchistan and North West frontier province the women are subjected to a rigid code of tribal beliefs and patterns of behaviour; where even the slightest deviation from the code can have detrimental consequences. Literature informs that whether a Pakistani woman in part of educated elite or the rural poor, she is governed by and subjected to the same rules of patriarchy which permeate in all classes and regions (Mumtaz & Shaheed, 1987: 21-23).

There are several discriminatory laws that negatively impact on women. Under the Muslim Family Law, women do not possess equal rights relating to inheritance, relating to the termination of marriage, and natural guardianship of children. Polygamy is not restricted by law, and there are not adequate provisions for women's financial security after the termination of marriage. Women do not have equal rights under the citizenship laws, where citizenship through descent is guaranteed only through the father, and which give the foreign wife of a Pakistani man the right to acquire citizenship, but a non-corresponding right for the foreign husband of a Pakistani woman (Zia & Bari, 1999).

Furthermore, the ADB (2000) informs that, a series of discriminatory laws were ushered as a part of the process of Islamization by Zia-ul-Haq during the late 1970s. The Hudood Ordinances promulgated in 1979 equated rape with adultery. A woman's testimony was not admitted to prove rape or adultery, and to prove innocence evidence of four Muslim males of good reputation was required. This created the situation where a woman could be charged for adultery if she reported rape but could not prove it. The Law of Evidence 1984 reduced the value of the testimony of two women equal to one man in financial transactions. The laws of evidence, Qisas and Diyat, institutionalize the compensation or blood money for crimes including murder and bodily harm. In this law, women's value would be considered equal to half that of a man.

The Constitution of Pakistan does not restrict women's participation in politics but nonetheless the presence of women in the political parties as well as in the political structure at the local, provincial, and national levels is restricted due to cultural and structural barriers. The government's legal and political procedures and measures have negative implications for women. The legislation further cements the norm of social discrimination and repression of

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<sup>9</sup> In terms of the gender gap, Pakistan's ranking has gradually dropped from 132 in 2006 to 135 in 2013. Pakistan ranks the lowest in Asia and the Pacific region.

women. The Laws invariably influence and shape social attitudes, and if the government is perceived as discriminating towards a section of society it consequently strengthens the forces opposed to that section. This gives impetus to male chauvinists in Pakistan, who locate strength and power from laws being promulgated and proposed in the name of Islam (Mumtaz & Shaheed, 1987).

Shaheen Sarदार Ali (2000) further reinforces the argument and comments that the public arena in Pakistan is predominantly male and the state and state institutions are the principal male actors. And when women are negotiating for demands of citizenship and rights, when engaging with this (male) gendered state the women's articulation of their demands is what both parties are unable to resolve and administer (Rai, 2000: 58).

Moreover women and men have different social groups, unless related by blood or marriage it is not the norm for men and women to socialize and befriend. Men have their own groups and clubs, which exclude women, in personal and professional circles. In view of these social and cultural dynamics relating to the intensely patriarchal Pakistani society, where inevitably different social and economic roles are assigned to men and women, we introduce the data from the bureaucracy of Pakistan. Weber envisaged the bureaucracy in the ideal form which functions independent of the social and cultural milieu.

But the focus of the following section is how the social cultural environment determines the nature and the functioning of the bureaucracy. The section deliberates on how the socially determined status hierarchies interact with organizational rules and regulations. It introduces the insights of the female bureaucracy and those of the male and female ministers. It then compares them with the findings of Kanter (1977), Wajcman (1988) and Ferguson (1984).

### ***Gender neutrality and Pakistani bureaucracy***

To have an idea on how organizations adapt to women in the sociocultural environment of Pakistan, I now introduce empirical evidence. The primary research tool was semi-structured, qualitative interviews, the duration of which ranged between 50 to 60 minutes. The unit of analysis was the bureaucrat. The questions were open-ended, and semi-structured and oscillated around the following themes: The prevalence of political neutrality, and the presence of independent and impersonal decision making and the absence of gender bias. The sample contained 38 bureaucrats (Male and female) and six ministers (Male and female).

A framework presented is constructed from Kanter's (Higher visibility, isolation, gender stereotyping), Wajcman's (Power is a man thing) and Ferguson's (Bureaucracy is a masculine entity and women remain subordinate) and will provide the main lens through data will be examined.

Focusing on the initial primary postings at the inception of the civil services career of the male and female bureaucrats, there appear to be divergences. Even though both compete equally on merit at the Civil Services examination, and undergo the same training in the CSS academy, once they are designated as officers the rules vary, as the following section illustrates.

### ***Women bureaucrats deprived from the start of their career trajectory: exposure to field positions***

Men and women compete equally for the allocated seats for the District Management group (DMG), after they qualify for these positions, the officers are sent for training at the Civil services training academy. On the completion of the training the officers are supposed to be posted to district/field areas and administer that particular field they are given charge off.

Women are not given this opportunity; they hardly ever get field jobs and are instead posted in the cities in the provincial offices. This is where the discrimination begins. The women lose out on important exposure and training of the field postings which most male bureaucrats being interviewed report on being ‘The highlight of their career.’<sup>10</sup> As a Pakistani female bureaucrat reports; and all of the others agreed in a similar vein:

‘Women are not tried in the difficult field positions like the deputy commissioner, so far only one woman has served as a deputy commissioner, so I understand there are difficulties in the field but mostly it is maybe the political leadership is not comfortable working with women, because they think women cannot succeed in a particular field posting. (Anonymized)

So immediately from the onset of their career the women officers are treated differently. Men after training become deputy commissioners, while women get the desk jobs in the provincial offices, being deprived of essential field exposure, the lack of which is a hindrance to success in their future positions in the organization.

A Pakistani male minister admits this prejudice:

‘But the male Politicians are not very comfortable with women becoming deputy commissioners and all’. (Anonymized)

### ***Sporadic transfers throughout their careers***

Female bureaucrats also do not enjoy the sense of same security regarding their posts as do their men counterparts.<sup>11</sup> They are posts are vulnerable to frequent changes depending on the whim of their political and administrative bosses. The female bureaucrats can at any time of their career be transferred at their whim, because ministers are not “comfortable with them”, such transfers and postings play havoc with the possibility of success in a bureaucrat’s career. When a new minister joins the ministry he would inevitably transfer the female bureaucrat from his office.

A female bureaucrat dispassionately confirms this fact:

‘Oh it has nothing to do with the calibre of the women officers but how they are conceived by the political leaders. It is the perception of the political bosses that they will not be comfortable working with the women.’ (Anonymized)

The calibre or competence, or expertise of the women officers is not considered when they are asked to relinquish their posts. With the arrival of a new minister, their current jobs become vulnerable as they male ministers view them through social and cultural lens:

‘I was appointed as secretary of health in July 2005, and I worked very, very hard, and after 3 months I was transferred along with some others. At that time I was called in by the Chief Secretary and the Additional chief secretary, and they were trying to be kind to me, and said that the chief minister is not comfortable with

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<sup>10</sup> 90% of the male officers interviewed stated the field postings at the start of their career were the highlight of their career and gave them indispensable exposure and training.

<sup>11</sup> Although many times men who try to be politically neutral also experience sporadic transfers.

me, and I said, why is he not comfortable with me? What have I done? They said nothing, and then I asked what have I not done? And they said nothing. We hold you in great respect and esteem, and you are a fine officer they said. But then why are you transferring me, in three months-time, what have I done, I asked? They said you know our society is toward women, and this and that. Then I told the CS that I will not go and join as secretary prosecution, and then I gave it in writing. And I said post me as an OSD since they are so uncomfortable with me. So then I was posted as OSD' (Anonymized)

***Women do not have adequate access to important portfolios***

Women also as Kanter (1977) suggests, stay out of the power loop. They are unable to secure relatively important portfolios, the most important and sought after posts, including that of secretary interior, secretary of establishment, secretary of commerce and chief secretary are nearly never ever offered to them. Women inevitably get stereotyped and get posted to relatively unimportant posts like women's welfare, GRAP (gender reform action plan), co-operatives etc. To this day there has not been a woman chief secretary of any of the four provinces. The important power jobs are inevitably 'manned' by men. This is affirmed by a female bureaucrat:

'In the provincial set up, there are departments which are said to be active and important, no women officers have been posted in those positions.' (Anonymized)

A female bureaucrats reports, in retrospection, on what she felt was a low point in her career:

'When I was promoted to grade 20, I was placed at an unimportant and a little, low post which I would consider a low point in my career. And maybe the high is yet to come.' (Anonymized)

Another bureaucrat rationalizes the reasons why women are unable to secure posts like the chief secretary of federal secretary:

'It's not the woman's fault, it is their mind set, the reason you don't see many women as federal secretaries or the chief secretary' (Anonymized)

Another female bureaucrat confirms the fact that real important positions where authority and power can be exercised remain off-limits to women, since the inception of their career they are not posted on field assignments, and consequently lose out on important exposure and training. This initial impediment translates in to a permanent handicap that restrains them from acquiring future important posts:

'Like secretary of finance, chief secretary for that post you need to have done field positions which women have not done. Departments that have real teeth are not yet open to women, as they feel that women would have inhibitions, dealing with politicians. I don't have them. Women don't enjoy as much freedom of movement from one position to another, and are mostly confined to few departments like the social welfare dept., cooperatives departments. These

departments are relatively smaller. There are very few female officers around in the first place, at the secretary ship level there are 3 or 4 total in the province, so also a large variety of male officers available, some who are highly rated, so they will be given the posts.’ (Anonymized)

All of the female bureaucrats report working on low profile and unimportant jobs, because of which they do not perceive their career as a successful one.

‘I have worked as secretary regulation, which is considered low profile, and as secretary management and professional development, which is again considered low profile’. (Anonymized)

Since there is agreement among the male and female bureaucrats that success is also synonymous with powerful and important postings,

‘A successful bureaucrat is one who would get the best of postings, both in the field and departments in secretariat. In senior positions gets to work in departments like finance, planning & development, agriculture, irrigation.’ (Anonymized)

So the career prospects of women are handicapped from the start. They are cognizant of the fact that they will be posted to relatively unimportant ministries and their career trajectory will be different from their male colleagues. And this is confirmed by a minister who signs the orders for the transfers and postings; his comment on the women bureaucrats confirms all of the above findings:

‘They are very talented... but they don’t get management posts... for example if someone becomes grade 18 or 19 they are given either something in the education, mostly in the women’s division, or GRAP(gender reform action Plan) which is a gender thing, or something else like that, they are not given powers or dealing directly. There are very few female deputy commissioners in the field.’ (Anonymized)

### ***Exclusion from all networks and clubs***

Another important issue is the exclusion of women from the informal networks. These informal networks play a major role in providing access to moving up the career ladder. Major decisions are made within these clubs. These informal clubs are open only to men, they are formed on the basis of gender, and further reinforced by old school association, current membership of the elite clubs and are further strengthened by the men getting together in the evening for a drink. Women are apparently from the wrong gender; they come from all girls’ colleges, and do not drink and smoke openly, and are more conservative than the average Pakistani male.

The fact that women are outside these powerful networks has been established by many researchers, ‘women are excluded from power broking informal networks’ (Edwards et al.1996, 1999). Men are also perceived to have developed informal relationships in the work environment

that keep out the women (Collinson and Hearn 1996). Women are outside these clubs, and this further alienates them from important transfers and postings.

The sense of ostracizing is reflected from the following female bureaucrat's comment:

'I felt as a woman I did face these, felt a kind of discrimination and a different Attitude; the men understood each other very well, they connected, they formed a club, they formed a clique and I was always outside that' (Anonymized)

A candid explanation for the ostracizing is offered by a female bureaucrat:

'Also the women can't do apple polishing, we can't sit with them and have a cigarette, and we can't have a drink with them.' (Anonymized)

And the women are fully cognizant of this exclusion:

'There is an informal network in the bureaucracy; women you know cannot have a drink with the male colleagues...women are out of all such informal networks'. (Anonymized)

A female minister also confirms the prejudice prevalent in the bureaucracy:

'Our environment which is very male oriented, there are certain things which even without noticing you will put curbs and inhibitions upon yourself... which we don't even realize... you know because we have been culturally trained to... as women sort of do that... you know because we will never sit and slap laugh, do the sort of things that we do with friends... And men would do it easily.' (Anonymized)

Another female minister confirms the prejudice,

'It happen with us also... we are on the trip with male members of the trip ... there is a comradeship which develops during official trips...women are excluded...' (Minister 1)

### ***Women deal with more pressure than their male counterparts***

Women inevitably have to deal with more pressures at work than their male counterparts. The bosses are viewing them through the social and cultural lens, and judging them as a lower, secondary sex:

'Yes, I have also faced discrimination, a lot of people can't deal with women, they just categorize women, it is difficult to handle, a lot of people cannot handle it, there was this boss who hated me, You know... I do feel there was some gender involvement in it too... he was a conservative person... who had a fixed views... I don't know how he saw me ... but something he couldn't relate to or be comfortable with....' (Case 28)

All the female bureaucrats complained of the higher visibility and objectification because of their gender:

‘We are told to talk to people and not work in isolation, you talk to people and know people ,that is how you work well, the problem is that when I tried to do that, I realized I fell in the trap of men trying to flirt with me or men not being professional...because I was a woman.. I am not saying all of them did that; what I am saying is that it gets very complicated... once you know that a person is pursuing you and the person also knows it then , you try to withdraw yourself from the situation, the whole situation affects your work.’ (Case 28)

Women are either the focus of attention because of their gender and are pursued, or they are looked down upon because of their gender and categorized as the secondary sex. Being at the receiving end of these biases has negative implications, as one female bureaucrat reports:

‘I can’t name any but my senior became interested in me, and started pursuing me.... And it became extremely difficult for me.... What do you? I didn’t know how to respond to .... I was really confused... I reported to him, so I found working very difficult, my mental energy was occupied dealing with that issue....’ (Anonymized)

As a minister confirms:

‘Women can be effective... and there are examples of very effective women in the bureaucracy...except that they have to deal with much more.’ (Minister 3)

A female minister very aptly reflects light on the whole situation:

‘But there are cultural hindrances. My first five years... one had to be very careful... but now I have become more chill especially now that I am married. That makes a difference. You need to be careful with who you spoke to or laughed with someone .....Imagine having to report to these people, you know close to very awful people who can get your promotion or not.... Right? I have come across incidences, for example women in the general secretariat, the women who are sexually harassed for promotional cases, I am not saying sexually as in literally.... In the sense that innuendos will be made there will be expectations... then in the local level Muzafar Gar... you know about the school teachers who have to do all sorts of favors to get in... you know all of this happens and we ignore it... because our society is so conservative we are not allowed to talk about it’. (Minister 1)

### ***Women used by government to look gender sensitive***

Women also report feeling used by the government, especially at times when the government wants to project itself as an enlightened gender sensitive organization to the national and international world. They often put the women in the forefront, especially in front of the international media.

‘I felt that I times I have been used as well, in the sense, if a government wants to show that they are “gender sensitized”. That look how enlightened we are.’  
(Anonymized)

Women do not think they benefit due to their gender, but only at times they have a gender value, where they are pushed forward to make a point: the female bureaucrats confirmed that there was only a loss to being of the fairer sex.

‘I don’t think women benefit at all. Maybe at some freak incident when the government is trying to appear enlightened. They are trying to give this image. Otherwise it is very rare that women benefit.’

### ***Women bureaucrats and the glass ceiling***

Women in the Pakistani bureaucracy soon reach the glass ceiling, and there is no room for climbing up the success ladder after that stage.

A male minister reports that,

‘I had an additional secretary, who was a woman, who I thought was as good as bad as any additional secretary could be. She would say that I cannot to the next grade because there is no concept yet of a performing woman full secretary, she said this is the end of line for her, and that which is very sad, and that affected her performance, because the motivation factor goes, when you realize you haven’t seen a women secretary before and you don’t have a very good chance to make it up to the next’. (Minister 4)

The ministers themselves comment on this bias prevalent in the bureaucracy, they themselves admit to viewing women from the social cultural lens, they agree that there are sporadic postings of the women bureaucrats, the acknowledge the damage caused to their careers, to which they are the important players, and the reason they sight for the postings and unnecessary transfers of women is:

‘Because I have seen that, women she has got no sides to take.. She is neutral...most of these politician wants a person to come who is related directly or indirectly to them so they can do there petty things.’ (Minister 2)

This is resonates strongly of Cockburn (1983, 1991) analysis where men employ their power tactics at work and maintain male hegemony. And the reasons ministers cite for not being comfortable working with the women and giving those important portfolios as compared to their male counterparts are:

‘Because women are less apt to, they believe in merit, and they want to leave an impact and because of that they go and stick to rule of business... which usually is not liked by most political animals...’ (Minister 3)

So the ministers do admit to the bias prevalent and their own role in perpetuating it further,



‘I think they have serious constraints working in Pakistan’s environment. I mean it is a very male dominant environment there is no doubt about that ... and women do face serious challenges... both culturally and socially... .... The women do face serious hurdles, bias and prejudices.’ (Minister 1)

### **Female bureaucracy and feminist literature**

This section relates the findings of the female bureaucrats with the feminist literature discussed in the earlier section.

As observed in the data, the study of the men and women in the Pakistani bureaucracy lend support to Kanter’s (1977) theory of Visibility, polarization, and stereotyping. The female Pakistani bureaucrat is more visible because of its gender; it is polarized from the powerful positions and the informal clubs, and is stereotyped by given specific unimportant, innocuous portfolios. Kanter’s (1977) concept and consequences of tokenism, is affirmed by the female bureaucrats, the female ostracizing is evident as positions of power and authority remain outside their grasp. The data also confirms Kanter’s (1977) dictum that the bureaucracy is gendered male. Although the solution that Kanter recommends, that if equal number of men and women worked together, that is if the token number is increased, then the negatives experienced by women would be eliminated. But in the case of Pakistani bureaucracy, merely by increasing the token numbers would not suffice. There is a gender bias and prejudice which would not be obliterated by merely increasing the numbers. Increasing the token numbers would be a step in the right direction but more needs to be done, the lens through which women are perceived needs to be altered.

Political leaders need to learn to become comfortable working with the women, bosses need to stop stereotyping them, and women need to be given access to prominent and powerful positions like their male colleagues. Since it is the male, whether the minister or the administrative boss that have monopolized the positions of power and authority, and do not allow women access to the corridors of power. The resistance offered by the male bureaucrats in allowing the women and men to work together as equals maybe because that undermines differentiation and hence male dominance (Yoder 1988). Boundary maintenance, then, as well as performance pressures and role encapsulation, are consequences of women’s gender status, not just their numerical status. And this gender status of women will not be improved merely by increasing the number of Tokens which Kanter (1977) recommends; increased numbers will not change the perception of women by the bosses. It will not make the politicians ‘comfortable’ working with the women. Women will still be outside the informal clubs, they will still not be able to have a drink with their colleagues and bosses. Although Kanter’s theory suggests that when the sex ratio in work settings alters, that will lead to a decline in tokenism and stereotyping, but that does not remove the actual issue which remains sexism (MacCorquodale et al, 1993). In the case of Pakistani bureaucracy by merely increasing the number of tokens will not renounce the problem. The rationale behind the discrimination against women needs to be understood which stems from a social, cultural and religious backdrop. This is the backdrop through which any solution must be considered.

Similarly the data from the Pakistani bureaucracy corroborates with Wajcman’s (1988) argument that management incorporates a male standard, that positions women out of place, the women in the Pakistani bureaucracy are sexualized, and not viewed as gender neutral, but viewed from a social cultural lens which inevitably bars them from positions of power and

authority. As Wajcman (1988) has argued, power remains a guy thing; women are never given the power to be a chief secretary, or federal secretary, or given the charge of running a powerful ministry. And as repeated in the interviews that it is not the competence of the women that is in question, or their professional excellence but the way they are viewed by the organizations that results in their ostracizing, hence confirming Wajcman's (1988) claim that 'organizational constraints rather than individual personality traits determine management style' (Wajcman 1988:62).

And further reinforcing Wajcman's (1988) assertion that the entry to senior levels is dependent upon the possession of appropriate cultural capital and related access to informal networks, and these processes are themselves gendered; hence automatically warranting the exclusion of women. As Pakistani bureaucrats women have often reported to be ostracized from all such powerful clubs where comradeship is established and careers are made or broken.

The data also supports Ferguson's (1984) dictum that the Pakistani bureaucracy is quintessentially patriarchal, and its foundation is gendered male. Her analysis relating to women informs that members of bureaucratic society are embedded within a political situation similar to that in which women traditionally find themselves, and are subject to a parallel set of forces and pressures through which subordination is created and maintained.' (Ferguson, 1984:83)

This is observed repeatedly as the social cultural bias is brought in by marginalizing the women from all aspects of power and authority. The main point of her feminization argument is that the consequences of male dominance teach the women the role of the subordinate, and this role becomes self-perpetuating. Women are not powerless because they are feminine; rather they are feminine because they are powerless, because it is a way of dealing with the requirements of subordination, this state is evident in the despondency of the women who resign themselves to the many lows they experience in their career when being transferred repeatedly on the politicians' whims, and not being able to take charge of a senior position when they achieve a higher grade.

Ferguson's (1984) conclusion about feminization is that it is the structural complement of domination, if affirmed by the data. But her recommendation that gender equality can be achieved by development of parallel women centred, non-hierarchical, participative, power sharing, and egalitarian organization based on feminine values maybe difficult to achieve in the Pakistani set up. Women will need to be in a decision making position to make that happen. Ferguson (1984) recommends that nothing less than the elimination of bureaucracies will truly allow women to get empowered, but the elimination of this institution is a huge change which requires major policy changes, where the policy is dictated by the men, who will not so easily relinquish control over the institution.

The fault is not with the women, their professional expertise or competence, but with the constraints that lie within and outside the organization. Kabir (1994) on the basis of research regarding gender relations within bureaucratic organizations informs that despite differences in the cultures, there is a similarity in the manner in which bureaucratic roles and practices actively reconstitute gender hierarchy. There is a dearth of women at the top levels of decision making, with the power to transform the existing state of affairs. This limited access to positions where women can formulate public policy to change the existing state of affairs offer little hope to the current gendered state of affairs. Rai aptly reinforces the complexity of gender issues:

‘The limited access of the majority of women in public sphere means that their ability to influence, oppose and change the policies that affect them is circumscribed.’ (Rai, 1996: 223)

### **The consequences of the gender bias**

Not only does the female bureaucrat suffer but so does the organization as a whole. The organization envisaged by Weber would have been the most efficient, in a gender neutral environment, where women did not face any impediment to their efficient working, but since a major prerequisite of gender neutrality is not met, the whole system and its efficacious mode of operation gets marginalized.

The bias is a deterrent to efficient and proactive working; as a female bureaucrat reports:

‘He would pick up , generally , whatever I suggested he would think there is more to it... he would keep sending the file back, elongating the work, I more often than not, whenever I would send some file up he would make it his business to find fault with it. He then started making negative comments in the file about me and then it would go up to the secretary that was how extreme his behaviour was.’  
(Case 28)

And work gets affected not only by the perception of the bosses and political leaders but also by the perception of the officials working under the bureaucracy, another female bureaucrat reports,

‘Work gets affected in particular things... like maybe when I was in the field, sometimes the revenue staff would not take me or my orders seriously, they think and do what they want to do, with my male colleagues they would not take such liberties with them. So my work suffered more’. (Case 28)

And a ministers affirms this gender bias, and agrees that women are not taken as seriously as their male counterparts,

‘Exactly you know if the women picking up the phone and calling up somebody to some work I mean the male on the other side... he would not take it as seriously as he takes the phone as a male...’ (Minister 1)

This sort of discrimination not only ensures that women do not have powerful, successful career like their male counterparts, but also de-motivates and disillusiones the women about future success in their career. It lends a negative mindset.

‘There have been many lows. The most important low was basically when you are judged as a woman; they think that as a woman you can’t do this and that. This happened against two positions that I got on merit, not through any safarish, but this excuse was used that because she is a woman’. (Case 23)

## Conclusion

It has become apparent that the Pakistani bureaucratic organization is not a gender neutral organization; the women in the organization are not a professional neutral but are sexualized by their gender. They are not rewarded for their competence or expertise, but are stereotyped and allowed to have limited access to success in the bureaucracy. They have a glass ceiling, beyond which they cannot rise. Women are excluded from the power equation.<sup>12</sup> Ministers transfer them on taking charge because they feel women will not be 'their' man, and will not liaison in their shady or lucrative dealings. Their male colleagues ostracize them from all informal networks. Consequently their work is affected, their career prospects are stunted, and they see a huge divergence between their career prospects and those of their male counterparts. The cognizance of this Bias and discrimination is a disheartening fact for them and de-motivates them due to the constraints brought on by the system. They have to work twice as hard to achieve the same result as their male counterparts, since they face double the burdens faced by the male bureaucrats. The efficiency at work gets marginalized; the organization as whole suffers. This resonates with Elson's (1991) finding that the organization's effectiveness suffers due to the male bias, and this bias is not only bad for women, but it is detrimental to the prospects of sustainable development.<sup>13</sup>

In conclusion, although the Civil Services exam remains equally open to men and women, and the bureaucracy appears on the surface to be a gender neutral organization with equal opportunity policies, the bureaucracy as a system and its access to power and authority remains restricted to men. The system is gendered as male. although the formal implementation of gender equality is assumed, recruitment in the services remain on the principle of merit, but once inducted in to the service, there are on introspection widespread differences on the perception and workings of the male and female bureaucrats. The career trajectory of male and female bureaucrats remains distinct and separate.

To understand the nuanced underpinnings of the Pakistani bureaucracy, cognizance of its social and cultural capital is imperative. Since in organizations the disseminated cultural images of gender are invented and reproduced, cognizance of cultural production is central for understanding gender construction. Due to these cultural images and prevalence of conventional gender norms, men monopolize the best postings and hence power. Women are ostracized from the informal networks and clubs, and from positions of power. Women are viewed through the socio/cultural lens, and the bureaucracy is unable to remain gender neutral.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> One important point stemming/or weakness of the research is that male officers who have tried to resist political interference, and attempted to be politically neutral have also experienced sporadic transfers, unimportant postings and have been denied promotions. Furthermore some of the female bureaucrats interviewed could have possibly blamed the gender bias when they failed to perform efficiently.

<sup>13</sup> An interesting angle to this western feminist literature and why it is applicable in the non-western setting is offered by Cockburn (1983) who proposes that men worldwide acquire their masculine identity from their work and if women do the same work with competence then they rob the men from their masculine identity. She stresses that power and authority remain inherently masculine. She also examines the power tactics employed in organization by the men which may not be visible but are effective in maintain male hegemony. She concludes that men do not allow women to enter the power game (Cockburn, 1991).

<sup>14</sup> This is a far cry from the Weberian bureaucracy espoused by Max Weber, who initially designed the bureaucracy in opposition to the then current traditional practices in operation at that time. At that time traditional, monarchic, hereditary and feudal methods were used to hold on to power and authority. Then social and cultural and religious notions governed the majority, and Weber's rational organization promised a departure from this route. Bureaucracy as a sharp contrast promised to be fair, rational and progressive, free from the prevalent social and cultural norms and biases. The bureaucracy was to break away from these traditions and within the workplace be a separate and a

It is generally believed, that after so many years of gender equality policies, we now live in a world that no longer requires special attention to equal opportunities.<sup>15</sup> But on closer inspection this is clearly fictitious. Men still monopolize power and authority. The institutions of work and the bureaucratic organization remains gendered male. We have not come far from the traditional, feudal and patriarchal forms of organizations from which Weber argued progression was necessary. The bureaucracy is unable to be a socially transformative agent. For an effective dealing with this bias, Sen & Beneria (1982) suggest that for a strategy with a feminist perspective to work, it should not be imposed from above, and to achieve equality, women and men need to be conscious to adequately deal with the deeply ingrained prejudices and practices. This will require a long process of change, and will be conditioned by the historical circumstances and the form of social and economic transformation of given societies. Therefore there exists a need to incorporate the gender bias in our understanding of the organizational behaviour and dynamics of the Pakistani bureaucracy, incorporating this reality and working towards its elimination would be conducive to efficient policy implementation and public service provision.

Max Weber did not integrate into his analysis the cultural and social milieu that inevitably informed the construction of rules and regulations in the 'ideal' Weberian bureaucracy. Cultural and social perceptions of the women inevitably alter the basic foundation of his depersonalized, gender neutral, rational bureaucracy. It can be inferred that not only is there an absence of Weber's gender neutrality in the Pakistani bureaucracy but also the critique can be extended to include the fact that the external environment matters to the functioning of the bureaucracy. Finally, it has the power to alter its basic premise.

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distinct system from the social milieu outside. Theoretically, at least, all were to be equal before bureaucratic laws, man and woman, with no bias or prejudice permeating the bureaucratic system.

<sup>15</sup> Sen and Madunagu (2001) further reinforce the reality of discrimination prevalent in international and local organizations. They conclude in their research and offer a final word to other development NGO's and networks by reflecting that at global and other levels the commitment to gender equality is fragile and , and the practices are tinged with patriarchy. Even the most progressive development NGO's have a tendency to leave the concerns of gender equality to be dealt by women's organizations.

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