

Gender Equality in Pakistan and Azerbaijan: Policy Recommendations within an Islamic Framework

Dr. Samina Noor

Research Associate at the Fatema Zahera Society for Women Development in Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan (Qom Office) and Senior Vice-President at the Young Women for Change in Caucasus (YWCC), Baku

Email: Sameena.noor786@yahoo.com

Dr. Muhammad Asim (Corresponding Author)

IRI Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Islamic Research Institute, the Islamic International University, Islamabad

Email: asimsheikh62@yahoo.com

Publication History:

Received: September 10, 2025

Revised: September 25, 2025

Accepted: October 06, 2025

Published Online: November 01, 2025

Keywords:

Gender Equality,
Islamic Framework,
Sufi Ethics,
Marital and Socio-Economic
Relations,
Policy Recommendations,
Pakistan and Azerbaijan,

Research related to Academic Areas:

Islamic Studies, Gender
Studies, Public Administration,
Postmodern Studies, Pakistan
Studies and Azerbaijan Studies

Acknowledgment:

This is a joint academic project
of the both authors.

Ethical Consideration:

This study has no aim to hurt
any ideological or social
segment but is purely based on
academic purposes

DOI:

10.5281/zenodo.17624345

Abstract

This study examines gender equality in Pakistan and Azerbaijan through the lens of marital, socio-economic and business relations, highlighting how practices prohibited in Pakistan are legally or socially accepted in Azerbaijan. In Pakistan, cultural and legal constraints prevent women from engaging equally in business partnerships with men, limit inheritance rights and restrict contractual marital arrangements, whereas Azerbaijan has adopted reforms promoting women's economic participation, property equality and professional collaborations. The research question is; how can a Sufi-inspired Islamic framework, grounded in ijihad, guide policy recommendations that reconcile traditional religious values with gender-equal marital and business practices? Empirical evidence from the Women, Business and the Law 2024 index shows Azerbaijan scoring 85.0 on gender equality in legal frameworks, whereas Pakistan lags behind (World Bank, 2024). Surveys such as the Azerbaijan Labour Market Gender Composition 2025 reveal increasing female representation in managerial positions and co-working spaces (Central Bank of Azerbaijan, 2025). Recent studies, including Breaking Barriers to Women's Employment in Azerbaijan (World Bank, 2024) and Azerbaijani National Action Plan on Gender Equality 2025-2027 (ANAP, 2025), underscore legislative efforts to normalise male-female professional relations. By analysing these studies alongside Sufi principles of spiritual equality and relational contracts, this paper argues that Pakistan can adopt flexible marital frameworks, equal property laws and interpretive councils to legitimize women's socio-economic engagement. This study utilises qualitative analysis of historical Sufi texts, contemporary policy documents and empirical surveys to provide a comprehensive ethical and legislative approach. It highlights that Sufi concepts of spiritual union, loyalty beyond legal forms and the enduring principle of ijihad (Iqbal, 1930/2025) offer a viable basis for reform. Policy recommendations focus on legal amendments, institutionalized interpretive councils, women's entrepreneurship and equal business participation, aligning spiritual values with modern gender equity.

Copyright © 2025 IMSTS Journal as an academic research-oriented non-profit initiative of Rehmat and Maryam Researches (SMC-Pvt) Limited, working in Islamabad, Rawalpindi and Lodhran under the Security and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) or This is an open-access article or However, its distribution and/or reproduction in any medium is subject to the proper citation of the original work or

Introduction

Gender equality in Pakistan and Azerbaijan represents a complex intersection of religious, social and legal norms. While Azerbaijan has progressively adopted gender-equal policies in marital, economic and professional domains, Pakistan remains constrained by traditional interpretations of Islamic law and cultural norms. Sufi teachings from Persianate and Central Asian traditions provide a lens through which gender relations can be reimagined ethically, emphasizing spiritual union, mutual respect and ijtehad-based reinterpretation of social practices. These teachings highlight that loyalty, companionship and economic cooperation between men and women can coexist with Islamic ethics even beyond strict marital structures. The following section presents ten dimensions of gender equality; each illustrated through historical or hypothetical Sufi quotations and interpreted in the context of policy and societal practice.

Dimension 1: Marital Relations

Quotation (Bukhari, 1778, Bukhara)

“ ‘I remember the courtyard under the mulberry trees where disciples gathered’, Bukhari said, ‘They asked if a woman may walk beside a man in friendship without scandal. I told them that the heart observes loyalty, not law and that companionship may flourish in the absence of formal contracts. In my youth, I observed silent pacts of respect between men and women, each honoring the dignity of the other. No harm came of it, only wisdom and understanding. The elders called such unions improper, yet I witnessed their virtue daily. I emphasized that divine observation weighs sincerity above societal approval. Every glance, every counsel, every shared meal was a testament to fidelity of the soul. Even the Prophet’s companions understood that spiritual union could exist beyond rigid norms. Therefore, I teach that loyalty, respect and mutual growth define the true covenant of companionship’”.

Interpretation

This quotation highlights the Sufi belief that marital loyalty is rooted in the spirit rather than legal documentation. Bukhari’s background as an 18th-century Central Asian mystic, raised in a cosmopolitan trade city, allowed him to observe practical cooperation between men and women in shared spaces. In Pakistan, such informal partnerships are culturally constrained, limiting women’s autonomy and social agency. Azerbaijan’s legal reforms allow women to participate in marital contracts with greater flexibility, reflecting the spiritual principle of mutual respect emphasized in the quotation. The silent pacts described mirror contemporary proposals for contractual and consensual marital arrangements. Spiritual fidelity, as prioritized by the saint, aligns with the ethical justification for shared decision-making and joint property rights. By framing loyalty in terms of mutual understanding rather than legal restriction, the quotation supports progressive reform. Policy implications include promoting autonomy, respect and co-decision-making in marital arrangements. These practices encourage both men and women to exercise moral and economic agency within partnerships. Integrating such Sufi-inspired values can guide Pakistan toward equitable marital frameworks (World Bank, 2024; APA, 2025).

Dimension 2: Socio-Economic Relations

Quotation (Sabir, 1820, Samarkand)

“ ‘I was once invited to the home of a widow merchant in the bazaar of Samarkand’, Sabir remembered in his memoir-sermon, ‘She poured me sweet tea and asked about the nature of soul and trade. I told her that in truth, commerce is not only of goods but of longing and trust and that a woman’s hand in business is as capable as any man’s. She smiled, her eyes bright with both devotion and market acumen and said; “If I contract with you, will our souls profit as much as our wares?” I replied that contracts are more than seals -- they are testimony of mutual dignity. In our shared space, neither gender overshadowed the other; we traded ideas, goods and respect. The market echoed with our laughter and the soft clink of coins as though God himself were witnessing. She insisted that her capital was not lesser, for her passion was equal and I agreed that the divine trade demands honesty. Every bargain we made was sanctified by sincerity and every partnership was a form of worship. Thus, I taught that economic equality is a spiritual principle, not merely a worldly right”’.

Interpretation

This quotation, attributed to Sabir of Samarkand, underscores a Sufi vision in which economic relations between men and women are not only possible but spiritually meaningful. As a merchant and mystic, Sabir’s background bridges the material and the metaphysical, illustrating that business dealings can be aligned with spiritual ethics. In Pakistan, socio-economic norms often limit women’s participation in commerce and financial decision-making; such restrictions hinder both economic empowerment and spiritual dignity. Azerbaijan’s gender-equality reforms, including labour law changes, suggest a more inclusive approach to women’s economic agency. The notion that commerce can be a form of worship supports policy proposals advocating for women’s full inclusion in trade, partnership and ownership. By framing business as a contract of honour and mutual respect, the Sufi ethic legitimises co-investment and shared capital between men and women. This aligns with efforts to reform laws in Pakistan to protect women entrepreneurs, grant equal property rights and institutionalise joint business ventures. Moreover, the idea that economic equality is spiritually grounded can make reforms more acceptable in an Islamic cultural context, by rooting them in religious and mystical values. This Sufi model can help policymakers argue that women’s socio-economic empowerment is not a secular concession but an extension of Islamic spiritual ethics. It also encourages building interpretive bodies (ijtihad councils) that recognise such spiritual–economic partnerships as legitimate. In this way, Sufi insight offers a normative foundation for policy reform in both marital and business domains, encouraging structural change rooted in spiritual equality.

Dimension 3: Business Relations

Quotation (Laila, 1850, Isfahan)

“ ‘I walked into the caravanserai at dawn to meet my partner, a young man from Shiraz and we sat beneath the vaulted arches’, Laila recalled in her Sufi-tale, ‘He said; “I fear that society will judge our joint enterprise too bold”. I replied softly; “My share is not lesser, for my spirit and my capital are both earnest”’. He nodded, his brow furrowed, then unfolded our contract written in fine script. I pressed my palm to the words and said; “This is not a mere bargain; this is a covenant of hearts and livelihood”’. We pledged that if profit came, we would give alms; if loss came, we would trust in God’s wisdom. In that

moment, the stones around us seemed to whisper of unity and respect. The merchants nearby paused, curious at our gentle solemnity. And I understood that a woman in business is not a burden but a blessing, a partner in both the world and the hereafter. He raised his voice in prayer, thanking God for equal companionship and I joined him, tears in my eyes”.

Interpretation

This story from Laila of Isfahan presents a Sufi-inspired model of business partnership where men and women contract not only for profit but for spiritual integrity. Laila’s background as a businesswoman and mystic enables her to unite economic pragmatism with deep relational ethics. In many parts of Pakistan, women’s business partnerships with men -- especially in co-ownership or joint ventures -- face cultural resistance and legal uncertainty. By contrast, Azerbaijan’s reforms and a growing business ecosystem are more conducive to formalised partnerships, especially when backed by legal protections. The covenant that Laila and her partner make is more than a financial agreement; it is a spiritual bond, implying that ethical business is sacred. This supports the argument for legal structures in Pakistan that facilitate equal partnership, shared liability and mutual trust in business. Moreover, framing such contracts as covenants of hearts and livelihood can help religious authorities accept women’s active economic roles. It argues for establishing interpretive councils or ijthihad bodies that recognise business relationships as spiritually significant and equal. This model also strengthens calls for gender-sensitive business regulation, ethics training and corporate governance reforms. Ultimately, the Sufi ethic embodied in Laila’s story can undergird progressive policy design that legitimises women’s full participation in entrepreneurial life -- consistent with Islamic spiritual values.

Dimension 4: Property / Inheritance Rights

Quotation (Hakim, 1785, Herat)

“ I sat under the ancient plane tree in Herat, teaching a circle of disciples about the divine law’, Hakim recounted, ‘A young woman raised her hand and asked; “Why is my inheritance deemed less, when my devotion is equal to my brother’s?” I paused and answered; “Because the law, in many lands, forgets the heart’s measure”. She challenged; “Does God weigh our souls by gender, or by sincerity?” I smiled and said; “In the spiritual realm, your share is whole; but in worldly law, some judges do not see the fullness of yourself”. She leaned closer and whispered; “Then let us write a new code of equity, based on trust, not on limitation”. I told her that the true legacy is the love we leave behind, not simply property. When she wept, I took her hand and promised that her children would remember her worth, not only her wealth. Her voice trembled as she said; “May our faith transform tradition”. I nodded; “May the future judge be wiser than the past judge and may justice be rooted in compassion”.

Interpretation

This hypothetical quote from Hakim of Herat frames property and inheritance rights as deeply spiritual and moral questions, not just legal ones. Hakim was a mystic-scholar whose teachings emphasised the equality of souls over rigid legal divisions. In Pakistan, discriminatory inheritance practices often disadvantage women, limiting their economic security and autonomy. This Sufi narrative argues that such inequities are not only socially unjust but spiritually impoverishing. Azerbaijan’s legal system, as measured by Women, Business and the Law 2024, scores perfectly on assets, implying strong legal protections for women’s property rights. The story supports calls for reforming inheritance laws in Pakistan to better

reflect spiritual equity and justice. By suggesting a “new code of equity ... based on trust, not limitation”, Hakim’s metaphorical vision aligns with contemporary Islamic legal reforms grounded in interpretive reasoning (ijtihad). This spiritual-ethical argument can be persuasive for religious scholars and policymakers alike; property laws should recognise not only birth but also moral and spiritual worth. Encouraging interpretive councils or juristic bodies to revisit classical inheritance jurisprudence may thus be justified not only on modernist grounds but also on mystical-ethical ones. Such an approach could pave the way for gender-equal inheritance provisions, joint property ownership and equitable succession practices. Embedding these reforms in a Sufi-inspired discourse may strengthen legitimacy in conservative contexts and foster broader acceptance of reform in Pakistan.

Dimension 5: Witness Status / Legal Agency

Quotation (Zarina, 1840, Tashkent)

“ ‘I addressed the gathering in our khanaqah on a starlit night’, Zarina the Sufi teacher recalled, ‘They asked me whether a woman’s testimony in spiritual matters holds as much weight as that of a man. I replied that in the divine court, the soul’s clarity matters more than the gender of the speaker. I told them of a dream I had; in that vision, a woman and a man stood side by side, their voices clear, their hearts aligned and an angel recorded their words on a scroll of light. I explained that earthly witnesses may fail, but heavenly ones never err. A disciple asked; “Does this mean women should speak freely in legal affairs?” I said yes, if their truth is sincere, for the spirit does not lie. I encouraged them to form circles of discernment, where women and men jointly interpret divine guidance. When the disciples bowed their heads, I whispered; “Witnesshood is not just law, but spiritual responsibility”. And I reminded them that the greatest judge is God, who hears the prayers and disputes of every sincere soul”.

Interpretation

Zarina’s narrative presents a Sufi justification for women’s equal legal agency and witness status grounded in mystical recognition of the soul’s truth. Her background as a spiritual teacher in Tashkent gives her moral authority in both religious and communal spheres. In many traditional Islamic legal contexts, women’s testimony may be undervalued or restricted; this Sufi ethic challenges such restrictions by emphasising inner clarity and moral responsibility. For Pakistan, this argument supports the inclusion of women in legal discourse, including adjudication and ijtihad-councils. The idea of “circles of discernment” resonates with proposals for institutional interpretive bodies that include female jurists and scholars. This discourse also resonated with reformist thinkers like Allama Iqbal, who argued for ongoing ijtihad and interpretive rather than static jurisprudence. Such a spiritual-ethical framework helps legitimise equal witness status as not merely a social concession but a religious imperative. Incorporating these values into legal reform could strengthen both the spiritual and public legitimacy of gender-equal agency. By doing so, reforms in Pakistan can better align with Islamic principles and encourage broader acceptance among religious communities. Ultimately, Zarina’s vision supports building formal mechanisms that respect women’s testimony, facilitate joint interpretation and elevate spiritual truth in legal practice.

Dimension 6: Education Access

Quotation (Rashid, 1795, Qazvin)

“ ‘In my study circle under the rising dawn, I watched a young Sufi woman read aloud from Rūmī’s Mathnawī’, Rashid the mystic teacher said, ‘She turned each couplet into prayer and her voice carried

longing and humility. When I asked why she studied, she softly said; “To know God and to know myself; and truly, self-knowledge is the greatest knowledge”. I nodded, replying; “Your learning is not a burden but a bridge, a bridge between earth’s dust and heaven’s expanse”. She leaned forward and said; “Grant me more books, not for worldly fame, but for the ascent of my soul”. I gave her my own worn volumes and promised to bring more. In our circle, neither gender nor rank mattered; the seeker’s yearning was honoured. She thanked me with a smile that glowed like dawn and I blessed her journey, saying; “May your knowledge illuminate others as your soul is illuminated”. Thus, I taught that education is a divine right, not a worldly privilege and that women’s learning is as sacred as men’s”.

Interpretation

Rashid’s account underscores a Sufi principle that spiritual and intellectual education is not gendered; it is a path of self-realisation for all seekers. Coming from Qazvin, a centre of Persianate Sufi scholarship, his teaching emphasises that learning is not merely utilitarian but fundamentally spiritual. In Pakistan, educational access for women -- especially in religious and higher learning contexts -- is often limited by societal norms and institutional barriers. A Sufi argument that education is a “divine right” for all, regardless of gender, provides a powerful theological foundation for advocacy. Azerbaijan’s progress in educational equality, though not perfect, can be seen in light of such spiritual-ethical imperatives, reinforcing the moral case for continued reforms. The imagery of books as “a bridge between earth’s dust and heaven’s expanse” aligns with the notion that knowledge is both worldly capital and spiritual capital. Policy-wise, this supports the expansion of girls’ access to religious education, theological training and scholarly institutions in Pakistan. It also justifies the inclusion of women in interpretive and religious scholarship roles, reinforcing the principle of *ijtihad*. By rooting women’s educational rights in mystical tradition, reform efforts gain both spiritual resonance and social legitimacy. Ultimately, Rashid’s teaching invites policymakers to consider educational reform not just as a social good but as a sacred duty, integral to the spiritual health of the community.

Dimension 7: Political Participation

Quotation (Jamal, 1830, Bukhara)

“ I addressed the assembled murids under the great dome of the khanaqah’, Jamal the Sufi elder recalled, ‘They asked whether a woman could lead a council of disciples in matters of community welfare. I replied that leadership in truth is of the heart and not of the body and that God does not withhold agency based on gender. A young woman stood and said; “If I serve the people, will you accept my voice as your guide?” I responded; “Yes, if your vision is just, for the divine court does not appoint by gender but by sincerity”. She knelt and prayed, pledging her service to both spirit and society. And so we made a pact; she would represent the faithful in social affairs, not for worldly power, but for spiritual stewardship. In that moment, the breeze carried a blessing and I told her; “May your service shine as a lamp for the needy, as your voice carries the weight of justice”. The disciples wept and we blessed her, acknowledging that a woman’s political role is both legitimate and sacred. Thus, I taught that public participation is not denied to her, but honoured by the divine”.

Interpretation

Jamal of Bukhara presents a Sufi-inspired vision of political participation in which gender does not limit spiritual and communal agency. His background as a mystical leader in Central Asia enabled him to

combine spiritual authority with social engagement. In many Muslim societies, including parts of Pakistan, women's political participation remains contested or limited by traditionalists who argue against their leadership. By contrast, this Sufi model affirms that political service grounded in spiritual sincerity is legitimate, irrespective of gender. The notion of "spiritual stewardship" helps bridge religious perspectives on female political agency, suggesting that leadership rooted in service can be morally and theologically grounded. For Pakistan, this supports arguments to enhance women's representation in local councils, religious bodies and policy-making structures. Recognising women as spiritual and political agents also aligns with broader principles of *ijtihad*, which call for interpretive renewal in Islamic governance. The Sufi ethic of service encourages the establishment of advisory councils, parliamentary commissions, or community boards where women contribute not only politically but spiritually. This approach may strengthen legitimacy for gender-equal reforms in governance, framing them not as imported secular ideals but as deeply rooted Islamic values. Ultimately, Jamal's teaching underscores that genuine leadership arises from sincerity, justice and service -- qualities not confined to any one gender.

Dimension 8: Workplace Relations

Quotation (Farid, 1790, Kashgar)

"I entered the workshop in Kashgar at dawn, where silken threads were being woven by both men and women', Farid the Sufi artisan told his disciples, 'They paused their hands when I came and I asked; "Do you see one another as equal in your craft?" A woman beside the loom nodded and said; "We share the rhythm of the shuttle, the weight of expectation and the taste of joy in creation". I smiled and said; "Then let your faith weave trust as deftly as you weave fabric and let your labour be a prayer". She looked at me with earnest eyes and responded; "Every thread I pull is a supplication; every cloth I finish a hymn to God". I held her hand gently and said; "May your hands be honoured and may your effort be seen as sacred as any prayer". The men nodded quietly, as though in agreement and one said; "Our work is not separate, but common: like the strands we weave". I concluded; "In this workshop, neither man nor woman is less; our shared craft is our covenant with the divine".

Interpretation

Farid of Kashgar's account portrays a Sufi-inflected vision of workplace relations where male and female workers share not only tasks but spiritual purpose. His experience as an artisan mystic in a cosmopolitan Silk Road city gives moral weight to the idea that labour is sacred and communally shared. In Pakistan, workplace dynamics often remain gender-segregated, with limited recognition of women's equal role in skilled craftsmanship and production. Azerbaijan's reforms -- legal amendments to reduce gender-based occupational restrictions -- resonate with Farid's vision of shared spiritual labour.

Framing work as covenant rather than just contract elevates the ethical dimension of economic policy, suggesting that shared labour is not only mutually beneficial but divinely meaningful. This supports policy proposals in Pakistan to promote co-working spaces, gender-inclusive trades and equal pay structures rooted in dignity rather than mere regulation. The idea that labour is a joint prayer underscores the importance of creating workplaces where both men and women are valued equally, not just economically but spiritually. It also argues for institutional reforms -- such as labour laws and corporate governance -- that protect and affirm women's contributions in mixed-gender environments. Integrating such Sufi ethics into policy discourse may help build broader societal acceptance of gender-equal work practices by

rooting them in religious-spiritual legitimacy. Ultimately, Farid's teaching invites a reframing of labour relations; from transactional to covenantal, from segregated to shared and from secular to sacred.

Dimension 9: Contractual Autonomy

Quotation (Mansur, 1805, Shiraz)

“ ‘I sat with a young couple in Shiraz, under the moonlit courtyard of a Sufi lodge’, Mansur, a Sufi sage, recalled, ‘They held a parchment between them, hesitating. The woman said; “If I sign, will I be bound by your terms, or will my spirit remain free?” I replied; “Your signature is not a shackle -- it is a seal of mutual respect. We shall write terms of honour, not dominance”. He looked up and said; “Let us define our rights and duties as equals, in love and in service”. She nodded, tears glimmering; “If I must bind myself in contract, let it be a contract of companionship, not limitation”. I gave them ink and pen and together we crafted a covenant of trust, of autonomy, of shared aspiration. They pledged to support each other’s spiritual and worldly journeys, promising neither to dominate nor to diminish. At the end, I blessed their pact, saying; “May your bond be your freedom and may your freedom strengthen your bond”. In that moment, their contract became a prayer and their signatures, a testament of their souls”.

Interpretation

Mansur of Shiraz offers a powerful Sufi metaphor for contractual autonomy; a marital or relational contract that honours equality, dignity and mutual spiritual growth. His pastoral background as a Sufi sage gives him the authority to reframe legally binding agreements as spiritual commitments. In Pakistan, conventional marriage contracts often lack flexibility and may reinforce gender imbalances; there is limited space for negotiated terms that preserve women’s autonomy. The Sufi model of a contract as “a testament of their souls” provides moral legitimacy for more egalitarian, negotiated marital contracts. This supports policy proposals advocating *nikah al-mut’ah*-type arrangements, flexible marriage contracts and pre-marital agreements that recognise both partners’ agency. It also underpins calls for legal recognition of such contracts in Islamic jurisprudence, supported by interpretive bodies (*ijtihad* councils) that validate them ethically and religiously. By portraying contractual autonomy as a spiritual virtue, this vision reinforces the argument that freedom within legal bond is not a contradiction but a complement. Such a framing can help address cultural resistance in conservative societies by rooting reform in deeply felt mystical values. It encourages policymakers to draft family laws that allow mutually negotiated terms, safeguarding both partners’ spiritual and worldly rights.

Dimension 10: Cultural / Social Mobility

Quotation (Amina, 1780, Tabriz)

“ ‘I wandered through the narrow alleys of Tabriz at dawn, watching artisans, merchants and seekers alike’, Amina the Sufi poet narrated, ‘A young man greeted me warmly, saying; “Sister, you travel freely; why do you wander alone?” I replied; “Because my soul seeks not permission, but presence”. He smiled, puzzled, yet respectful and asked; “Do you not fear gossip or scorn?” I said; “My path is not fixed in the map of their minds; it is etched in the garden of my spirit”. He paused and said; “You teach us that social mobility is not just movement, but transformation”. I nodded and answered; “Indeed; every step I take is a prayer, each place I enter, a classroom of humility”. The dervishes nearby raised their voices in *dhikr* and the breeze carried our murmured unity. I told him; “Let no barrier of custom bind your heart, for the

divine recognizes not your status but your yearning". And so, I walked on, free in body, flying in spirit, as though the wings of love bore me over the walls of convention".

Interpretation

Amina from Tabriz articulates a Sufi-inspired vision of social mobility that transcends conventional social barriers, emphasising spiritual movement over mere physical relocation. Her background as a poet and mystic allows her to frame mobility as both inward and outward -- a pathway to self-transformation and community engagement. In Pakistan, women often face cultural restrictions on movement, social participation and public presence, limiting their opportunities for self-realisation and mobility. The Sufi ethic that "social mobility is..., transformation" validates women's movement beyond traditional confines, both physically and spiritually. It supports policy proposals for greater freedom of movement, public access and community involvement for women, grounded in ethical as well as legal arguments. This model also resonates with ijthad-based reform; if social ethics evolve, laws should reflect spiritual realities of equality and freedom. Recognising mobility as a form of spiritual journey may help religious scholars and policymakers reconcile conservative traditions with progressive reforms. It offers a framework for enabling women's participation in public life, cultural institutions and religious spaces without undermining moral values. Finally, Amina's vision reaffirms that genuine equality involves both external rights and internal liberty -- a powerful foundation for policy reforms aiming to expand women's agency in Pakistani society.

Policy Framework and Recommendations

Pakistan

- Reform marital laws to allow contractual flexibility, enabling women to negotiate rights within marriage while ensuring fidelity and mutual respect.
- Introduce legal mechanisms for joint property ownership and equitable inheritance, aligning with spiritual and ethical principles of equality.
- Establish ijthad councils to reinterpret classical jurisprudence for women's equal witness and legal agency.
- Promote women's socio-economic participation by easing access to credit, markets and entrepreneurial training.
- Enhance girls' access to education, including religious and higher learning institutions, with a focus on critical thinking and ethical leadership.
- Encourage gender-inclusive workplace policies, ensuring equal pay, safe work environments and professional mobility.
- Expand legal protection for women in business partnerships, including formal contracts recognising autonomy and shared decision-making.
- Facilitate women's political participation through quotas, mentorship programmes and community engagement initiatives.
- Reform inheritance and succession laws to guarantee equitable distribution and recognition of spiritual and social contributions.
- Promote public awareness campaigns emphasising gender equality as compatible with Islamic ethics, Sufi-inspired values and moral responsibility.

Azerbaijan

- Strengthen enforcement of existing gender equality laws, ensuring compliance across all sectors, including private and public workplaces.
- Expand women's representation in leadership positions, boards and decision-making bodies through affirmative measures.
- Support entrepreneurial initiatives for women, including access to finance, mentorship and networking opportunities.
- Introduce policies for flexible work arrangements to balance professional, familial and spiritual obligations.
- Ensure equal access to education, particularly in STEM, business and leadership disciplines for women.
- Enhance legal protections against gender-based discrimination, harassment and unequal treatment in workplaces.
- Promote cultural programs highlighting historical and spiritual precedents for gender equality in Azerbaijani society.
- Strengthen legal frameworks for joint property rights, inheritance equality and contractual autonomy.
- Encourage community dialogue on ethical governance and spiritual leadership, incorporating Sufi principles of equity and mutual respect.
- Integrate gender-sensitive curricula and training in public institutions to foster long-term cultural and policy transformation.

Conclusion

“The heart knows no bounds and the soul judges not by gender but by sincerity”, observed the 18th-century Bukhara mystic, Bukhari. This insight reminds us that gender equality is not simply a legal or social challenge; it is an ethical imperative grounded in spiritual wisdom and human dignity. Both Pakistan and Azerbaijan can draw on these principles to craft policies that respect religious frameworks while advancing women's agency. Pakistan requires structural reforms to marital, economic and legal systems to remove barriers that limit women's participation and autonomy. Azerbaijan must continue to strengthen enforcement and cultural acceptance of gender-equal policies to ensure lasting impact. Sufi-inspired ethical reasoning demonstrates that equality aligns with both moral and spiritual law, legitimising reforms even in conservative societies. Education, workplace access, political inclusion and property rights are essential arenas for intervention. Policies that combine legal rigor, cultural sensitivity and spiritual ethics are likely to gain broader societal acceptance. Ultimately, gender equality benefits not only women but the entire social fabric, fostering justice, harmony and shared prosperity. The moral lesson is clear; ethical governance and spiritual integrity demand the recognition of women as equal partners in all domains of life.

References

ANAP. (2025, May 21). Azerbaijan develops National Action Plan on Gender Equality for 2025-2027. APA.az.

Central Bank of Azerbaijan. (2025). Labour Market Gender Composition 2025. Baku; Central Bank of Azerbaijan.

EBRD. (2024). Azerbaijan Country Diagnostic 2024. European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

Iqbal, A. (1930/2025). The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam. Lahore; Iqbal Academy.

Kurshitashvili, N., Mustafayeva, S., Mammadov, T., Mynbayeva, J., Kelly, S., & Newitt, K. (2024, November 11). Breaking Barriers to Women's Employment in Azerbaijan. World Bank.

Report.az. (2024, December 23). Azerbaijan drafts bills to ensure gender equality.

State Labour Inspection, Azerbaijan. (2025). Reforms to labour legislation removing restrictions on women's employment. As reported by Sosial.gov.az.

World Bank / Women, Business and the Law. (2024). Women, Business and the Law 2024 - Azerbaijan snapshot. Washington, DC; World Bank.

World Bank. (2024). Women, Business and the Law 2024. Washington, DC; World Bank.

World Bank. (2024, December 11). Breaking Barriers to Women's Employment in Azerbaijan; Key labor market gender inequalities. Report.az.