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Forced Marriages in Pakistan: Causes and Consequences

Outline

1. Introduction:

1.1 Hook

1.2 Background

1.3 Thesis statement

Forced marriages in Pakistan are outcome of patriarchal and tribal structures, poverty or economic dependency of women, illiteracy, parallel legal systems, gender inequality, and weak enforcement of laws and judicial delays resulting in violation of Human rights, Health risks, domestic violence and marital discord, psychological and emotional trauma, ~~and~~ increased illiteracy rate of women, ^{and} impact on international image of country and developmental setbacks.

2. Causes of Forced Marriage in Pakistan

2.1. Patriarchal and tribal structure

i. Control of male elders over female autonomy

- DATE: _____ DAY: _____
- ii. Tribal traditions such as Vani, Sura to resolve disputes among tribes.

2.2. Poverty and Economic dependency of women

- i. Early marriages of girls to reduce financial burden of family.

- ii. (Unicef), Report of Unicef on child marriages in South Asia depicting 18.1% of girls¹⁸ married in Pakistan before the age of 18.

2.3. Illiteracy and lack of awareness

- i. Lack of awareness of legal rights regarding marriage.

- ii. Census 2023 of Pakistan portrays 52.8% literacy rate of women, and 68% of men.

2.4. Customary and Parallel legal systems

- i. Tinga and panchayat system in rural areas often override state laws

- ii. Practice of Vani & Sura in rural areas despite Supreme court Saro Mata 2019.

2.5. Gender inequality

- i. Women treated as objects and intellectually inferior to men

- ii. Gender Inequality index ranks Pakistan at

148 (last in list)

2.6. Weak law enforcement and judicial delays.

- i. According to HRC report, only 2% of registered cases of child and forced marriages resulted in conviction.
- ii. Lack of protection of victim and

3. Consequences of Forced Marriages in Pakistan:

3.1. Violation of Human Rights

- i. Breach of constitutional right of dignity and liberty (Article 9 and 14 of constitution of Pakistan)
- ii. Contravenes CEDAW and Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

3.2. Health Risks

- i. Early marriages lead to early pregnancies and maternal mortality
- ii. UNICEF: Adolescent mothers face double risks of dying during childbirth.

3.3. Domestic Violence and Marital Discord

- i. Lack of emotional compatibility between partners leads to abuse.
- ii. Higher divorce rates

3.4. Emotional and Psychological Trauma

i. Increased rate of depression, anxiety, isolation, and suicidal thoughts among women.

ii. HRTE report 2023 shows more inclination of self-harm in women married earlier.

3.5. Decreased opportunities of Education and economic independency

i. Girls pullout of schools for marriages.

ii. No sense of career building in women who got married earlier.

3.6. International image of country and developmental setback

i. Gender disparity leads to negative image of country

ii. International NGOs and donors such as UN Women and USAID often condition their aid on gender reforms.

4. Recommendations to reduce ratio of forced Marriages in Pakistan

4.1. Community awareness campaigns.

4.2. Empowerment of local governance and women protection cells.

4.3. Educational and economic empowerment of women.

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4.4. Strengthening law enforcement and prosecution processes.

4.5. Promoting role of media for awareness.

5. Conclusion:

S.1. Thesis restated

S.2. Thoughts concluded.

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The Essay

"No woman should be forced to marry against her will. The right to choose one's partner is fundamental to Human dignity," stated by Kofi Annan - former UN Secretary General, clearly depicts that right to marry the partner of one's choice is fundamental right of ^{both} women and men as it ensures the prosperity of such relationship. Historically, it had been an issue as women were always treated as objects in all societies and empires. Kings and emperors also used to abduct women and women were obliged to serve kings despite their unwillingness to do so. Likewise, though Islam has given women many rights but still customs and traditions of societies overpower, override the rules of Islam, leading to early marriages, abuse, and violence in Muslim countries and societies. Globally, women are ostracized, marginalized and treated as others who lack intellectual capability to take their decisions appropriately, so men do this task for them. Women

are forced to marry a stranger due to various reasons globally. In South Asia, ^{accounts for} according to UNICEF profile, 45% of global child and forced marriages. In Pakistan, issue of forced marriage is quite evident as Pakistan accounts for 18% of such marriages in South Asia due to various reasons resulting in violating autonomy of women. In short, forced marriages in Pakistan are outcome of patriarchal and tribal structures, poverty or economic dependency of women, illiteracy, parallel legal systems, gender inequality, and weak enforcement of laws and judicial delays resulting in violation of Human Rights, increased health risks, domestic violence and marital discord, psychological and emotional trauma, increased illiteracy rate, and impact on international image of country and developmental setbacks.

Essentially, In strong male-dominated families and tribal hierarchies decision-making is a task of male elders, which is the main reason behind forced marriages in tribal areas. As women have less agency in such areas so they

are not allowed to take decisions. Their role
purpose in the house is to cook and serve
to men of their family even the male children
has more liberty in decision making. Women
are used to resolve disputes among tribes not
by taking a decision rather by getting used
as slaves. For examples, in traditions like Vani
and Suwei being practiced in Kerala and South
India girls are given in marriage of any man
to settle blood feuds and disputes. If women
go against decision of their tribes, they are either
killed or sanctioned to defy morals and traditi-
on of their family. In short, tribal system has
played a significant role in making women
voiceless and through various customs to such
as forced marriages.

likewise. In poor households, marriages of daughters
lift economic burden from family that is why
families try to marry their girls as early as
possible without their consent. It is said that
poverty has potential to lead to child marriages
so marrying their daughters without their consent.

is not a very big issue. They gain economic benefits through such marriages as one person poor family decreases and they often not obtain amount to pay for their daughter with sister that alleviate financial burden of family.

Report of **UNICEF** on child marriages in South Asia shows that 18% of children and girls are forced to marry before the age of 18 years that result in complications regarding health of those girls. In short, this cycle of poverty feeds on sacrifices of women rapidly and early marriages that are mostly forced is one of the major sacrifices among all.

Moreover, lack of awareness and illiteracy is understandable reason behind the forced marriages in Pakistan. According to census of 2023 in Pakistan literacy rate of women is 52.8% quite less than men's that is 68%. These statistics shows that the half of women are still not educated mean they are not aware of their rights given to them by United Nations charter on Human rights, constitution of Pakistan, and

by Idhar. This very negligence and lack of awareness result in forced marriages as they follow commands of their male elders by considering them intellectual and right decision-makers of their family because women consider them superior. limited access to information narrows perceived options. Areas of Sindh and Balochistan show higher rates of forced marriages because ⁱⁿ these areas women are more restrained from getting education. Hence, education is directly proportional to reduction in number of forced marriages as educated women will fight for their rights.

Additionally, parallel justice systems such as jirgas & adal panchayats often override the state laws leading to legitimization of forced marriages in such areas. In Balochistan, KP, Sindh and South Punjab ^{reported} cases of jirgas decisions portrayed as how women are always compelled to bow down before the decision of jirga as going against will result in loss of life or their family may suffer.

because of their decision because of influence of both parallel systems. In 2019 Supreme Court of Pakistan gave decision against Nani and Savana to stop such practices in order to empower women but these practices are still operational in such areas showing weak enforcement of Pakistan's ^{policies} by executive institutions.

Furthermore, gender inequality is considered as root cause behind forced marriages in Pakistan.

According to gender inequality ^{gap} ^{Report 2015} index, Pakistan is at 148th position, last in list, shows that in Pakistan inequality between both genders is maximum.

Due to this gender based inequality men are considered superior and women as inferior and property of men. Due to this very gap women are forced to be in honour-based forced union by males of their family. Kohistan video controversy 2011 shows how women are treated by dominated men in this patriarchal society of Pakistan. Women are not allowed to take decision in any field of life such as education, marriage, childbirth etc. in many cases women

do not want to give birth to children but they are forced by men to do so. likewise, if they ~~are~~ give birth to baby girl they are treated violently by men despite knowing that they are innocent. Consequently, leading gender inequality or gap in Pakistan forces women to take many decisions ~~that~~ against their will including marriage.

In addition to it, one of the main reason behind force marriages that one can not neglect is weak enforcement of law and judicial delays in Pakistan. According to HRC report, only 1% of registered cases of child and forced marriages in Pakistan are resulted in conviction. There can be because of various reasons as in many cases victims are not protected by police department. Likewise, police often avoid going to such areas labelling it as "family matter" or matter of a tribe, due to which forced marriages do not stop in Pakistan. Apart from this judicial delays ^{such as} like 16 years old girl in Kasur who was forced into marriage under vain custom.

despite her medical reports that confirmed her age and ^{2 years} delay in justice that ultimately acquitted due to insufficient evidence. In short, weak enforcement laws are reason forced marriages are still present in Pakistan, if

Apart from all above mentioned reasons there are many other reasons responsible for forced marriages in Pakistan such as faulty interpretation of law where it is considered religion allows the hegemony of men, social pressure from family, peers, society, neighbours, and fear of stigma etc. There are serious consequences of these forced marriages on women, society and country as well.

Among all consequences of forced marriages violation of Human Rights is of great importance. Human rights allows women to choose partner of their own choice globally. Due to forced marriages breach of constitutional right of dignity and liberty occur that allows one to be a respected citizen of the society in Pakistan - according to Article 9 and Article 14 of constitution of Pakistan. Likewise, CEDAW also

give women rights to liberty, dignity, respect and ~~have~~ be treated as equals to men to eliminate all kinds of disparities between men and women. Forced marriages are not only against laws of CEDAW and Universal Declaration of Human Rights but they also snatch from women right to live as right to live is not all about (living), just breathing rather it is about living with basic necessities and protection of all fundamental rights. Hence, due to forced marriages violation of all such rights occurred making women vulnerable in Pakistan and worldwide.

Another consequence of early marriages that are forced as well is severe impact on health of women. In rural areas of Pakistan, women are tie in marriages due to rani custom and others like this due to which they are not treated as human beings. They are obliged to give birth to children at early age and even if they are adults due to repetitive pregnancies women become vulnerable as they die during

pregnancies and child birth most of the times. According to UNICEF, Adolescent mothers face double risks of dying during childbirth because their body becomes weak. Despite such reports in Pakistan this number does not decrease because of poor enforcement of laws and lack of awareness of women about their rights. The maternal mortality ratio in Pakistan was 155 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2023. means every 1 out of 10 women face risk of maternal death. consequently, women become more weak and objects in society of patriarchy.

Additionally, forced marriages often result in the domestic violence and marital discord.

As two partners are bound to live in a place when they do not even like each other. because marriage was done with consent not they because of lack of compatibility their crisis start that ultimately leads to abusive relationship. in such kind of relationship men often tend to do infidelity leaving women with many children. Women not only have to

responsibility of themselves but also of children as men give away responsibility of children leading to divorce of such partners. Due to forced marriages ratio of divorce has increased in Pakistan. In short, forced marriages disrupt the institution of marriage completely.

Furthermore, due to force marriages women get more psychologically and mentally disturbed. Not only in the rural areas of Pakistan but in many urban areas too women who are forced to marry a person whom they don't result in psychological trauma because of abusive relationship. Due to abusive relationship they often feel anxiety, depression and isolation in their own houses. and if they think of getting separation then social pressure and fear of stigma of divorced (leads) to adds to agony ultimately, forcing women to commit suicide. In most of cases, women even don't care about their children and if they do so they face that mental trauma throughout their life. According to

HRCP report 2023 women married earlier tend to show more self-harm in Pakistan. Consequently, forced marriages are not disastrous for the physical but for mental health of women.

Moreover, forced marriages do not impact the (educational) physical and mental health of women rather they leave unfathomable impact on the educational stability of women. Women in Pakistan are pulled out of schools in their early ages and one of the major reasons behind this is marriage. Most of the parents want their daughters to marry, get married earlier to lift financial burden. For this reason they do not get educated resulting in lack of awareness of their rights. Due to many such pull outs no sense of career building develops in women as they know they have to bow down to decision of their elders. This lack of education results in economic dependency of women on their fathers, brothers and their husbands. In short, forced marriages are one of the way to maintain structure of patriarchy.

early. ~~gender~~ forced marriages not only affect lives of people rather it has serious impact on economy of the country as well as international image of country. Gender gap reports ranks Pakistan last on the list depicting it as a country where women are inferior to men psychologically, physically, economically, and ^{division of} in labour. Due to this particular reason other countries' investors often do not want to invest in such country.

International NGOs and donors such as USAID condition their aid on gender reforms. As for the prosperity of country gender equality is pre-requisite.

In Pakistan, ~~one can tackle~~ This issue can be tackled

(of forced marriages) through community awareness campaigns that highlights the rights of women.

Additionally, empowerment of local governments can show miracles through women's protection cells that will protect women when they are needed. Along with it, ~~strengthening~~ There is a need to strengthen law enforcement process

that will ensure that if in case of any deviant behavior they are properly punished and women get protection under law. Lastly, media can play significant role in this regard by exposing women. In short, issue of forced marriages is not insolveable rather right policies can wipe it out of Pakistan.

In ~~conclusion~~ conclusion, forced marriages in Pakistan are result of gender hegemonic structures, lack of economic stability of women, other customary legal systems, unequal gender relations and weak law enforcement institutions due to which forced marriages violate human rights, cause health risks both physical and psychological, increase illiteracy of women, and ultimately affecting good name of country and trust of country for developmental and other projects. Forced marriages are often considered as minor issue but it is one with deep roots affecting all fields of life and all institutions of country ultimately deteriorating prosperity of country.