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01. Forced Marriages in Pakistan: Causes and Consequences

01. Introduction:

Thesis Statement: Due to patriarchal norms, economic pressure, and weak legal implementation forced marriages are prevalent in Pakistan, leading to severe consequence from violation of human rights to hindrance of women empowerment.

2. Causes of forced marriages in Pakistan:

2.1. Patriarchal and honor
based mindset

2.2. Economic pressure and poverty

2.3. Prevalence of tribal
and customs of a culture

2.4. Lack of education and
misinterpretation of
religion

2.5. Weak legal implementation

2.6. Political and economic
alliances in elite class

3. Consequences of forced marriages
in Pakistan:

3.1. Violation of Human Rights

3.2. Psychological and emotional
trauma to victims

3.3. Domestic violence and
marital conflicts

3.4. Hindrance to women's
education and empowerment

3.5. Perpetuation of poverty
and social backwardness

3.6. Increase in divorce
and runaway cases

4. Conclusion

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Ali and Sara wanted to marry each other. They have made a lot of plans about their marriage, but destiny has something else.

When the brothers of Sara came to know about this, they killed

Sara in the name of honor, but

what was her mistake at all? Every individual has liberty — one can choose the way of life and the people with whom one wants to spend this life.

Marriage is a sacred relation between a man and woman, who are building blocks of society and then ultimately nations. However, in Pakistan, not everywhere but in the most parts, these blocks are not strong enough because they are forcefully placed there.

Unfortunately, forced marriages are prevalent in Pakistan because of many reasons like patriarchal and honor based mindset, economic pressure

and poverty, and prevalence of tribal and cultural customs.

Another major cause of forced marriages is political and economic alliances in the elite class - depicts that this issue is not only of lower or middle class. As every issue has consequences, so does it has. One of the major consequences of forced marriages is domestic violence and marital conflict. Apart from this, perpetuation of poverty and social backwardness is another major consequence of forced marriages. So, one can say without any doubt that due to patriarchal norms, economic pressure, and weak legal implementation forced marriages are prevalent in Pakistan, leading to severe consequences from violation of human rights to hindrance of women empowerment.

To begin with the causes of forced ~~major~~ marriages in Pakistan, the first major cause is patriarchal and honor based mindset. Pakistani society is male-dominated society where women have no autonomy over themselves. Every decision regarding their lives from education to career is taken by a male guardian - the decision of marriage is taken by them too. The women have no option to say no. For example, according to UN Women Report of 2022, 40% of women in Pakistan have limited or no say in choosing their life partner. This report clearly indicates how women's consent is not taken into account. Hence, patriarchal mindset is depriving the women of her right to choose life partner, becoming a major factor behind forced marriages in Pakistan.

Another major cause of forced marriages in Pakistan is economic pressure and poverty. Pakistan is a country where nearly half of the population is living below the poverty line. Moreover, coupled with increasing population, it leads to severe consequences. Children, especially girls are treated as a burden and parents want to get rid of this burden as soon as possible - by marrying them to anyone. A UNESCO report has indicated that in Pakistan, 21% of girls are married before age 18. This report shows how parents are reducing their burden by marrying their daughters at such early ages. Thus, forced marriages prevail due to economic pressure and poverty.

Furthermore, prevalence of

tribal and cultural customs is another major cause of forced marriages in Pakistan. Pakistan is a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic nation, where each have their traditions and customs. In some of these cultures, early child marriages and some other concepts like Swara and Vani are present that become the major cause of forced marriages in those regions. In many tribes of KPK and FATA, a girl is married to an elder in order to settle a dispute between those two parties.

The dreams of that young girl gets buried as her tribe has decided her fate. So, these cultural practices also lead to forced marriages.

Moreover, lack of education and religious misinterpretation is another major cause of forced marriages

in Pakistan. Pakistan is an Islamic Republic but unfortunately, in many rural areas, women are uneducated - regarding both religious and modern contemporary education. Islam has given the right to choose a life partner for her, but they are not aware of these teachings. Many rural women accept the choice of life partner by their parents as her fate and consider it their duty to accept the decisions of their parents because Islam orders to accept the saying of parents. Nobody has told them about their rights given by Islam - everyone has told them their duties. Hence, religious misinterpretation and lack of education also leads to forced marriages.

Apart from these, weak legal implementation is another major

factor behind forced marriages in Pakistan. Laws are just a piece of sentences written on paper, if they are not implemented properly. In order to make them effective, their execution is must. However, in Pakistan, unfortunately, laws against forced marriages exist too—but only on paper. For example, Prevention of Anti-Women Practices Act, 2011 was made that criminalizes forced and exchange marriages, but due to weak implementation nothing has changed. This weak implementation has caused mistrust among the victims and they have no other option or hope to get justice. So, unfortunately, this weak legal implementation becomes the major factor behind accepting forced marriages.

In addition to these, another major factor behind forced marriages is the political and economic alliances in the elite class. It is often considered that this issue belongs to lower class or middle class only, but this is not the reality. The young generation of elite class are mostly subjected to forced marriages because of their status conscious parents. Their parents use them as pawns for their business deals or power lust. In many political families of Sindh and Punjab, intra-family marriages are common to maintain wealth consolidation and political alliances. Those young individuals have to sacrifice their dreams and have no other choice left except to get tied in a compromised relation. Therefore, political and economic alliances become major cause behind forced

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marriages in elite class.

Forced marriages is one of the major and most prominent issue in Pakistan. This issue leads to severe consequences on individual, social, and national level from affecting individual life to whole family life structure. Let us discuss those consequences.

One of the major consequences of forced marriages is violation of human rights. There are some fundamental and natural rights given by both religion and constitution and some universal human rights. Among those rights, the right to choose a life partner is also there given to both men and women. Forced marriages violates this religious, constitutional, and

universal human right by snatching their right to select a lifepartner for themselves. So, by snatching this right, human rights are violated.

Another major consequence of forced marriages is psychological and emotional trauma. It is human nature that does not allow him to live with unwanted people, and then marriage is one of the closest relation between two peoples who have to live with each other through every thick and thin. However, if the partner is unwanted then it leads to severe psychological and emotional traumas.

For instance, Kainat Soomro was victim of forced marriage who suffered a lot both psychologically and emotionally. Kainat escaped and later became a voice against forced marriages. So,

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forced marriages not only violates human rights but also affect individual's mental and emotional health.

Furthermore, one of the major consequences of forced marriages is domestic violence and marital conflicts. In male-dominated society, women is often subjected to violence and it is much likely if the woman is not the choice of that man. The husband tortures his wife for talking to any other male or not listening to his mother or sisters. According to a report of Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey, 28% of women, who are married, have experienced physical violence. Thus, in a forced marriage, woman often becomes the subject to her husband's anger.

In addition to these

consequences, another major one is hindrance to women's education and empowerment in Pakistan. In Pakistan, gender equality is almost negligible in most areas. From politics to economy, education to career, and birth to death, women are suppressed. Forced marriages become the major obstacles in the way to empower women, as they cut the wings of young girls by subjecting them to marriage at young age. According to UNESCO, 12 million girls are out of school, mostly due to early marriage pressure. Hence, hindrance to women empowerment is another major consequence of forced marriages.

Moreover, another one of the major consequences is perpetuation of poverty and social backwardness. Women in Pakistan makes nearly

equal population, but in various fields of life they are not getting equal opportunities. Because of forced marriages, women are subjected to household chores - they have to say goodbye to their education, career, and dreams. The result of this restriction is poverty and social backwardness.

According to World Bank, Pakistan's GDP could increase by twenty-three percent (23%), if women participation rose by just ten percent (10%). Forced marriages restrict and control women's role in society, ultimately affecting national progress. Therefore, forced marriages not only damages an individual's life but also leads to economic issues.

Apart from these, increase in divorce and runaway cases is also major consequence of forced

marriages. When individuals do not find each other compatible for them, they want to get rid of this, either through divorce or running away. Moreover, if a girl is continuously subjected to violence, her only resort is to demand Khula or run away and live in a charity house — because her parents have said goodbye to her at the day ~~she~~ of her marriage.

The divorce cases in courts and girls living in charity houses clearly indicates how forced marriages have affected their lives. So, the basic purpose of marriage could not be fulfilled because of forced marriages leading to undesired consequences.

To conclude all this, forced marriages is the prevalent and

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a serious issue in Pakistan, particularly because of domestic, economic, or materialistic factors leading to severe consequences at individual, social, and ultimately national level. A marriage does not mean to tie a man and a woman in a relation with each other, but it is an institution that is required to strengthen themselves, support each other through every thick and thin, and raise their children for the betterment of this society. If this institution is weak, then everyone has to bear the worst consequences. The major causes behind these forced marriages are; Weak legal implementation, misinterpretation of religion, and the norms of tribes. Women is considered as property of a man, and is deprived of her rights.

This issue leads to severe consequences like poverty, breaking of family system, and mental health crisis.

This issue is of great concern that needs to be addressed properly.

Males should be taught that like them women can utilize their rights too. Islamic teachings about marriage should be included in the basic curriculum

to make the girls aware about ~~there~~ their rights. Most importantly, the laws should be implemented as soon as possible, and the offenders such as tribal chiefs should be

convicted. Had Sara's brother ~~had~~ not killed her because of the so-called honor issue, Sara could have married Ali and lived a life

they dreamt of. May be, Sara could have contributed to the well-being of society and Pakistan too. That Sara has been killed, but there are

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many Sara who can be saved.