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③ Topic:

Can Laws alone protect Women
in Pakistan?

Outline

A. Introduction

Thesis statement

Deprivations of women in various domains manifest that laws alone can not protect women in Pakistan. Critics argue there are multitude of constitutional guarantees that protect women. However, a comprehensive analysis reveals a nuanced reality that laws alone can not protect them.

B. Manifestations that Laws Alone Can Not protect Women in Pakistan

1. Lack of political participation of women.

2. Prevalence of gender-based violence;

a. A gloomy picture given by UNHCR about gender-based violence.

3. Unequal representation of women in leadership positions;

a. Absence of women in organizational hierarchy

4. Lack of financial autonomy of women

5. More girls are out of school compared to boys

6. Wage gap between men and women.

7. Widespread illiteracy of women;

a. About half of women are illiterate

8. Unequal burden of unpaid work on women

a. A disproportionate number of women occupies unpaid work in agriculture

9. Lack of bodily autonomy of women

C. How Laws Alone Protect Women in Pakistan

1. Constitutional guarantee of equal access to education

2. Legislative measures to grant equal political participation to women;

a. Election Act 2017 ensuring equal political participation of women

3. Institutional measures to grant financial autonomy to women

D. Conclusion

1 Essay

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie argues in her book "We all should be Feminists" that once she wanted to stay in a luxurious hotel. However, the hotel's guard denied her entry. He thought that she was a prostitute as women could not afford to stay in a luxurious hotel. This incident underscores financial insecurity of women despite legislative guarantee to make them financially autonomous. Laws are legislative measures that bound the state to protect women in every domain of life. Contrary to this, deep seated deprivations of women in various domains manifest that laws alone can not protect women in Pakistan. Critics argue that a multitude of constitutional provisions alone ^{can} protect women. However, a comprehensive analysis reveals a nuanced reality that laws alone. It is evidenced from lack of political participation of women, widespread gender-based violence, their unequal representation in leadership positions, lack of financial autonomy, increasing drop-out ratio of girls, and wage gap between men and women. Likewise, their widespread illiteracy, unequal burden of unpaid work on them, and their lack of bodily autonomy.

are another indications that laws alone can not protect them.

Opponents emphasize that laws, such as constitutional guarantee to ensure their access to education and political participation, and institutional measure to grant them financial autonomy, can protect them. It is like making mountain out of a molehill, an in-depth examination reveal that laws alone can not protect them.

To begin with, there is lack of political participation of women that corroborate the stance that laws alone can not protect them. To participate in politics, they need family support. In patriarchal society like Pakistan, women are not allowed to go out of their homes without escort.

Similarly, to run election campaign, they need escort as well as financial resources to organize rallies and mobilize public support. As a result, women are underrepresented in politics. due to lack of such support. **Rehab Khelid** notes in her article "Embracing Feminism" that only 25% of parliamentarians are women in national assembly.

of Pakistan. This lack of political participation of women due to family support underscores that laws alone can not protect them.

Likewise, there is the prevalence of gender-based violence. Constitutional remedies exist to make the perpetrators of gender-based violence. However, women do not resort to court because of their lack of financial autonomy as filing a case in courts requires sufficient amount of money. Apart from this, their families prohibit them to seek legal remedy. They deem that it will bring disgrace to them. As a result, women do not resort to court to seek justice. Consequently, gender-based violence are rife in Pakistan despite legal remedies.

According to **World Health Organization (WHO)**, one in three women in Pakistan has faced gender-based violence. In this way, laws alone can not protect women in Pakistan.

In the same way, women are under-represented in leadership position. The reason is that reaching leadership position needs extensive experiences and skills. Women in most

instances lack these. Dr. Ishraai Hussain observes in his book "Governing the Ungovernable" that women do not make organizational hierarchy due to their lack of adequate education and skills.

As a result, career progression chances are very rare for them in Pakistan to promote to leadership positions. Therefore, they are under-represented in leadership positions.

In this way, laws alone can not protect women from deprivations.

Moreover, more girls are out of school compared to boys. In Pakistani society, boys are considered the breadwinners of their

families. Therefore, their education is given importance while that of girls is ignored. Moreover, early marriages compel them to discontinue their education.

As a result, more girls are out of school compared to boys. According to Global

Gender Gap Index Report (2025), there are 26 million children are

out of school. Majority of them are girls. In a nutshell, despite constitutional guarantee,

more girls are out of school than corroborate the stance that laws (alone) can not protect

women.

In the same way, women lack financial autonomy in Pakistan. They lack the required education to secure gainful job in the labor market. According to Global Gender Gap Index Report (2025), only 22% of women participate in formal workforce in Pakistan. In most circumstances, they earn but their earnings are not under their disposal. This coupled with their lack of participation in formal workforce obscures their prospects of getting financial autonomy. As a result of patriarchal set up, they are dependent on their families' earners for financial security. This way, they lack financial autonomy, indicating that laws alone can not protect women in Pakistan.

Likewise, they lack bodily autonomy. In the deep-rooted Pakistani society, men are considered ~~the~~ breadwinners of their families as all financial burdens are bore by them.

This makes them more assertive in their families. As a result, all decisions including family planings are taken by men. Women

have little to say in decision-making. In this way, lack of bodily autonomy depicts that laws alone can not protect them.

Moreover, there is the prevalence of illiteracy of women in Pakistan. The reason is that girls' parents' fears for their security when they leave home for schools. This confines them to their four walls of their homes. Poverty is another hindrance to their education. In poor families, boys are sent to school as they are considered the future breadwinners of their families. As a result, disproportionate number of women are illiterate. According to Economic Survey of Pakistan 2024-2025, only 52% of women are literate compared to more than 60% of males. This illiteracy illustrates that laws alone can not protect women.

Similarly, the burden of unpaid works is disproportionately fallen on women. Women are considered caregiving, nurturing and docile. Therefore, all domestic responsibilities, including rearing children are performed by

them without getting recognition for their work. Similarly, they share more burden in agriculture in rural areas. To add insult to the injury, they do not get reward for such work. In Pakistan, more than 60% of women are the active labors in agriculture sector. This manifests that the burden of unpaid works falls on women, demonstrating that laws alone can not protect women.

Last but not the least, there is the persistence of wage gap between women and their male counterparts. Employers deem that males are more intelligent than females. Therefore they perform their tasks more efficiently compared to women. This leads them to make discriminations in wages.

Dr. Ishraï Hussain argues in his book "Greening the Ungovernable" that women in Pakistan are paid percent less than males for the same type of employment. This evidences that women can not be protected by laws alone.

Despite the self-evident truth, critics argue that laws

alone can protect women. Some of the arguments in their favour are given below:

Constitutional provisions guarantee equal access to education. Education is the key to a prosperous life. Recognizing this importance, Article 25A of Pakistan's constitution ensures that the state is bound to provide free and compulsory education to all genders. This provision emphasizes that laws alone can protect women. However, most of the girls do not complete their secondary education due to their early marriages. **Maleeha Lodhi** in her book "Pakistan: Search for Stability" notes that only 29% of girls complete their secondary education in Pakistan. This indicates that laws alone can not protect women.

Similarly, constitutional guarantee exists in Pakistan to ensure equal political participation of women. **Election Act 2017** mandates every party to allocate at least 5% to women as reserve seats for contesting the election. However, in Pakistan, election

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is contested only by those who have sufficient financial resources as well as a renowned family background.

Dr. Ishrat Hussain argues in his book "Governing the Ungovernable" that elite class women can contest the election due to their reputed family background. Women from the grass root are not given ticket to contest for election due to their lack of financial autonomy and well-reputed family background. As a result, women are underrepresented in politics, indicating that laws alone can not protect women.

Last but not the least, institutional measures seek to grant women financial autonomy. State Bank of Pakistan's "Banking for Equality" initiative

mandates all commercial banks to appoint twenty percent representation to women.

However, Saira Somroo in her article "The Motherhood Penalty" notes that women in Pakistan, give up their careers because of the absence of day care facilities for their children as well as inflexible working hours. As a result, women do not participate in formal workforce due to their domestic responsibilities as women.

In a nutshell, laws ^{alone} can not protect women in Pakistan.

To sum up the long debate it is concluded that multifarious deprivations fail laws the sole guarantor of women's protection.

It is manifested from the lack of practical participation of women, widespread gender-based violence, prevalence of women's illiteracy, wage gap between males and females, and the like. Critics argue that laws about education, politics, and financial autonomy can protect women.

However, a thorough analysis
indicates that laws alone
can not protect women.

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