
LEGAL PLURALISM AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN PAKISTAN: RELIGION, STATE AUTHORITY AND SOCIAL PRACTICE

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Abstract

This article examines how legal pluralism shapes women's rights in Pakistan through the interaction of state authority, religious norms, and social practices. Adopting a qualitative socio-legal approach, the study analyses statutory provisions, judicial decisions, documented case materials, and relevant secondary literature to explore how multiple legal orders operate concurrently within everyday governance. The findings show that while women's rights are formally recognised within Pakistan's constitutional and legislative framework, their implementation is frequently constrained by localised interpretations of Islamic law and deeply embedded social hierarchies. State courts, religious authorities, and informal dispute-resolution mechanisms operate within overlapping and at times competing spheres of authority, producing outcomes influenced by both institutional limitations and socially sanctioned expectations. By foregrounding women's experiences within these plural legal settings, the article demonstrates that access to rights is shaped through negotiation, mediation, and power relations rather than solely through formal legal rules. It argues that assessments of state efforts to promote gender justice must account for the interdependence of religion, law, and social norms in shaping legal outcomes. The study contributes to scholarship on legal pluralism, religion-state relations, and gender justice in Muslim-majority societies, while offering insights relevant to legal reform, governance, and social justice initiatives.

Keywords: Legal pluralism, Women's rights, Religion and state, Gender justice, Islamic law, Pakistan.

INTRODUCTION

Legal pluralism in Pakistan is one of the inherent characteristics of the Pakistani legal environment, and it has significant consequences on the rights of women. The state formally expresses a harmonized legal order, which is based on the Constitution and statutory law. As a matter of fact, though, this order goes together with religious norms and customary regimes that govern everyday life, conflict management, and access to justice (Griffiths 1986, 12; Barker 2019, 508). The legal system in Pakistan is therefore an overlapping source of various sources of authority, such as the Islamic jurisprudence, the common law of the colonial era and informal local dispute

systems, including jirgas. Such a stratified legal landscape makes it difficult to administer justice as well as the realities that women experience as they struggle to claim their rights in and against such intersecting constructs. The importance of this research is that there is always a discrepancy between what the law says and what the law does. Although the Constitution and statutory structures in Pakistan propose equality, the application of the rights is interceded by rival powers and social institutions. As an example, constitutional guarantees can be expressed by courts, but local dispute settlement procedures are usually more legitimate and create social rules that undermine women (Haq 2015, 540; Siddique 2016, 322). Legal pluralism, then, is neither an impartial co-existence of laws nor a co-existence of bargaining and conflict, as it also affects who has a right to what, in what way.

The main research question that the article is going to offer an answer to is the influence of legal pluralism on women gaining their rights in Pakistan, specifically, the relationship between the religious norms, the state power, and the social practice. Although formal law has often been the most important place of rights enforcement, as focused on in mainstream legal scholarship, this method is insufficient in societies that are regulated through plural normative orders. The power of religious norms in Pakistan, particularly the interpretation of Islamic law is in tandem with civil law and customary practices, which tend to support gendered imbalance. Some of the issues, such as family, property and personal status, are often influenced by religious arguments and societal demands beyond the formal state apparatus, provoking crucial questions of law power, legitimacy and realisation of rights (Badar 2018, 15; Rabbani 2019, 92). The study will be informed by three research questions: How do various legal actors interrelate to influence women's access to rights in Pakistan? What is the place of the religious norms and usual practices, as opposed to or together with the formal state law? What implications do these intersections on how women live in seeking justice? The article addresses important questions and thus can be discussed in the perspectives of legal pluralism, governance, and the rights of women in Muslim-majority societies.

This article achieves fourfold objectives. First, it traces the lines of legal pluralism in Pakistan, showing the coexistence and overlaps of the statutory law, religious norms, and customary practices. Second, it examines what this pluralism entails in respect of women's rights, and displays ways in which various normative orders aid access to justice or limit it. Third, it looks at structures of power and warfare within the courts, religious institutions, and community systems and how they manifest their effects in practical situations. Fourth, it makes more extensive inferences about governance, law reform and gender justice in plural legal settings (Menski 2006, 103; Jackson 2003, 153).

The investigative methodology used in the research is a socio-legal one that involves a combination of doctrinal and field research, such as interviewing women, leaders of the community, legal professionals, and researchers. This method acknowledges that formal legal texts cannot be perceived outside of the social circumstances in which they are applied (Paige 2018, 191; Haq 2015, 545). To trace the formal legal framework, a study also includes the review of the relevant constitutional provisions, statutes and case law. Such a mixed-method design gives a subtle insight into the interpretation, conflict, and implementation of legal norms in a pluralistic legal order in Pakistan.

The areas of this article are areas where plural legal orders have the most visible implications on women, i.e., individual status, family relations, dispute resolution, and access to justice. Although legal pluralism is prevalent in many areas, these areas represent gendered side effects of legal overlaps. The historical legacies, such as the colonial law system, the post-colonial reforms, the era of Islamisation, and various other factors, contributed to the modern interaction of formal and informal legal systems and provided the chances and obstacles to women in the name of justice (Zaman 2002, 78; Eisenstadt 2010, 45).

This study is not only applicable to Pakistan. Legal pluralism describes most societies with a Muslim majority, and the analysis of its effects on the rights of women gives some insights into the constraints of formal law where normative diversity is embedded. The article serves as part of the wider discourse of gender justice, power and legitimacy, and social practice in plural legal environments by pre-emptively describing women's experiences (Cavanaugh 2009, 120; O'Dwyer 2015, 37).

Overall, this article does not consider legal pluralism as a stagnant co-existence of different legal systems but as one in which religion, state, and social practice involving women interact to create their rights. It studies the effects of plural legal orders on access to justice, social negotiation, and gendered results in Pakistan by means of a mixture of doctrinal and empirical analysis. This introduction lays the groundwork to an in-depth discussion of legal pluralism, power and the realities lived by women that operate in overlapping and intersecting legal systems.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The discussion of the legal pluralism as applied to the Pakistani setting should be placed in larger theoretical contexts that deal with the presence of several normative orders. In its broad meaning, legal pluralism refers to the presence of two or more sources of law in a given socio-political discipline. Griffiths (1986, 3) argues that legal pluralism does not only involve the co-existence of formal and informal legal systems, but also a sophisticated negotiation of power, legitimacy and authority. Menon and Sengupta (2015, 42) highlight in the

South Asian context that plural legal orders are a historical development as a result of colonial influence, religious and customary practices. Similarly, according to Menski (2006, 107), in Pakistan, the formal system of law is intertwined with both the Islamic law and locally based customary regulations, thus creating a stratified system where the formal law system often collides with the forms of non-state law.

The legal pluralism is analyzed based on several theoretical approaches. The legal centralism is one where the priority is given to the state law and the non-state norms are seen to be a secondary or peripheral one. The legal-pluralist approach, in its turn, acknowledges the validity of various legal orders and explores the relationships, conflicts, and compromises between them (Barker 2019, 510). This view comes in very handy when it comes to studying gendered consequences in Pakistan, where religious leaders, state courts, and customary councils inter-adjudicate marriage, inheritance, and family disputes. Hansen (2017, 88) also believes that legal pluralism can be used to understand the choice of women to deal with these overlapping jurisdictions and the way power relations are entrenched in normative regimes.

In Muslim dominated societies, it is the interface of religion and state that is decisive in defining legal pluralism. The sharia, which is Islamic law, is construed and made institutionalized in varying contexts to produce a spectrum of legal authority as well as state-approved codes. According to Cavanaugh (2009, 115), religious law as a source of both moral authority and a regime of social control, in particular, the personal and family law, is very common. The Islamization policies of the 1970s and 1980s in Pakistan established the religious norms in the formal state law, and thus, hybrid legal systems were formed, where statutory law includes Islamic principles (Rabbani 2019, 94). Such interactions have made it difficult to apply constitutional rights since the statutory rights are often construed to fit the religious standards at the cost of equality of sex.

Evidence has been given to highlight the implications of religion-state relationships on the legal rights of women in practice. As Haq (2015, 542) shows, women's statutory rights are frequently compromised by the local customary laws and religious arbiters in situations related to inheritance. Siddique (Siddique, 2016, 327) discovers that female litigants in family courts face obstacles not only due to the limitations of the procedures but also due to the inherent nature of religious and social norms. These results demonstrate the difference between official statutory promises and lived reality, which proves the necessity of socio-legal analysis to consider the various strata of power which influence the rights of women in Pakistan.

The analysis of gender and law rights in South Asia provides further background. The former is defined by profoundly rooted patriarchal standards in South Asia that cut across both formal and informal legal regimes. According to Jackson (2003, 152), although property, custody and divorce access are subject to mediation by the state law in Pakistan, India and Bangladesh, the mediation process is often influenced by the religious and community institutions whose focus often depends on the male authority. Paige (2018, 193) records that women have to negotiate between various normative systems, trying to adjust the claims of statutory law to the demands of the family, religion, and custom. All these studies have brought out the realization that the gendered legal outcomes cannot be interpreted in isolation of the interaction between the legal codes and the socially practised codes.

The idea of legal pluralism scholarship also concerns the issue of legitimacy and authority. Griffiths (1986, 12) underscores that battles between formal law and customary or religious law do not only represent technical matters but large-scale social and political bargains. This argument is furthered by Hansen (2017, 90) who shows that women's agency is normally limited to the competing demands of various legal orders which each claims its autonomy on different grounds. In Pakistan, courts of law can appeal to some constitutional or statutory authority, local religious councils to scriptural authority and communal elders to customary expectation. The emerging plural legal environment leads to diverse results, which are contingent upon context, and it is therefore crucial to explore not only macro-level instructions on law but also micro-level experiences.

In spite of the large amount of corpus available on the issues of legal pluralism and the rights of women, certain gaps remain. To begin with, the literature is heavily biased towards either formal law or customary practices in a manner that rarely involves a combined approach to the systematic analysis of lived experiences of women (Baderin 2003, 67). Second, studies tend to focus on law in urban or elite settings, failing to see the rural and marginalized population where plural legal practices are most evident and decisive (Hussain 2017, 274). Third, limited interaction with the temporal dynamics of religion, state and gendered social norms is observed, especially regarding post-colonial and Islamization reforms. The way to fill these gaps is by adopting a method that integrates both the doctrinal legal analysis and qualitative methods as it focuses on the field of empirical research, including the statutory provisions and the negotiation of rights in everyday life (Zaman 2002, 81).

Moreover, some of the studies focus on how women are being challenged, but not many of them explore the strategies of resistance or negotiation which women apply in the plural legal environment. This lack of knowledge limits the comprehension of the agency of women and the possibility of legal reform, one respectful of cultural background and gender equality (Abu-Lughod 2013, 21). With such a combination of legal theory and socio-cultural analysis, a more refined picture of the workings of legal pluralism can be created that helps to construct, enslave, and sometimes empower the rights of women in Pakistan and similar Muslim-majority settings.

To sum up, it can be stated that legal pluralism in Pakistan is not only theoretically complicated but also socially influential. Several normative orders, such as the statutory law, Islamic jurisprudence, and customary practices, intersect in a manner that influences access to justice by women. The practical implementation of gendered legal rights is mediated by religion-state combinations, past experiences, as well as socio-cultural practices. However, the existing literature is still unproductive in terms of its combination of the analysis of doctrines and the fieldwork and the focus on rural or marginal communities. This paper fills these gaps by looking at how the relationship between law, religion, and society is dynamic and specifically how women in Pakistan manage to take up the plural legal systems they face in the country.

CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual and theoretical framework used in this study is based on the ideas of legal pluralism, state power, and social practice and thus provides an analytical tool that examines the rights of access to women in Pakistan. Legal pluralism refers to the presence of various legal authorities within one social space, which includes formal statutory law, religious guidelines and practices (Griffiths 1986, 3; Menski 2006, 107). This conception goes beyond the classical legal centralist view that assumes the primacy of state law, in recognizing the fact that non-state normative orders have their own authority and legitimacy that affect social behaviour and legal outcome. Legal pluralism especially applies to Pakistan, whereby the state framework is in a continuous interplay with the Islamic jurisprudence and customary institutions, which include jirgas and panchayats, that create overlapping jurisdictions which influence the legal rights of women.

State authority in this regard can be understood as the ability of formal legal institutions to control behaviour, adjudicate and enforce legal rights. The authority of the state is formally written in the Constitution, statutory law, and judicial precedents in Pakistan. However, the success of such power depends on societal approval, the administrative ability, and the authenticity of the legitimacy bestowed by the actors on the ground (Rabbani 2019, 92; Haq 2015, 540). In spite of the fact that the Constitution ensures women equality and access to the law, these practices are often moderated by religious interpretations and traditional norms, which often support the gendered hierarchies (Siddiqi 2016, 327). The conceptualisation of the state authority assumes therefore, instead of being absolute, it is regarded as one of many forces that interact, and thus, the legal and social environment, in which women exercise their rights.

Social practice refers to the daily practices, norms, and unofficial regulations that regulate human interactions in communities. It involves cultural, religious and traditional ways of doing things which could or could not be in agreement with the established legal statutes. Pakistan In Pakistan, statutory and religious laws are commonly interpreted and enforced locally under social influence (Paige 2018, 193; Badar 2018, 15). As an example, although women in rural regions have statutory inheritance rights, they can be forced by family or community pressures to exercise their rights. The social practice thus plays the role of mediator and constraint, creating a distance between the legal guarantees and reality. These practices are important towards the analysis of the dynamics of legal pluralism and how they contribute to gendered access to rights.

The paradigm brings these three notions, legal pluralism, state power and social practice as an analytic framework to simplify the manner in which power is exercised, bargained and challenged in Pakistan. Authority is not absolute but is shared among various actors, with the state, religious institutions and the community leaders among others invoking various sources of legitimacy. Governance, in this case, is not only formal institutions of state but also informal means of the production of rules and reproduction of norms (Barker 2019, 510). The analysis of the power practice in formal and informal circles helps the study establish the structural and cultural impediments that influence the access of women to justice and legal rights.

The gendered access to the rights is one of the main elements of this analytical framework. As the experiences of legal pluralism of women in Pakistan show, access to rights is intermediated by various forms of intersecting authority, such as patriarchal social norms, religious interpretations, and institutionalised legal structures (Haque 2015, 542; Siddique 2016, 322). Although men can move across legal frameworks that are intersecting, women are often faced with institutional restrictions that curtail their agency, decision-making abilities, and entitlement. As a result, the framework underlines the importance of legal pluralism as an analytical tool rather than a descriptive one, but as a tool to understand power, inequality and social justice. A gendered approach also shows the dissimilar impact of legal pluralism, as well as explains how conflicting norms and authority influence the allocation of rights and the ability to reform the law (Jackson 2003, 152; Paige 2018, 191).

The theoretical framework used in this paper is based on the socio-legal theory, which balances between the dogma-based legal analysis and the social practice (Hansen 2017, 88; Menski 2006, 109). The social-legal theory insists on the fact that law cannot be perceived without paying attention to its cultural, political, and social contexts. In the Pakistani setting, this point of view allows exploring the interaction of statutory law, religious standards, and traditions to yield, in most cases, unforeseen or paradoxical results about women. The socio-legal lens also provides the tools of analysing compliance, negotiation, and resistance mechanisms and, in doing so, takes into account the role of the women and other actors in manoeuvring plural legal orders.

The feminist legal theory has also been used in this study to examine the gendered aspects of legal pluralism. Feminist legal studies suggest that law is actively practiced and reproduces social inequalities, such as gender inequalities (Abu-Lughod 2013, 21; Cavanaugh 2009, 120). Formal laws of equality in a plural legal setting can co-exist with religious practice or custom which enforces patriarchal coercion. The feminist legal theory provides a critical approach towards unravelling these contradictions, the study of power relations, and explaining how women challenge, bargain, or bypass these norms in a restraining manner. The combination of the socio-legal approach with the feminist views enables the study to adopt both the structural inequalities and the agency of individuals, thus, a holistic approach in the study of access to rights based on gender.

Three interconnected aspects of analysis are used to operationalise the conceptual framework. In the first place, the paper analyses how power is shared between the formal state entities, religious leaders and local customary actors. This dimension examines the basis of legitimacy alleged by each actor as well as the actual enforcement procedures that the actor makes use of. Second, the paper examines the practice of governance by looking at how overlapping legal orders govern behaviour and decide in cases of dispute, especially in matters of family and property. Third, the paper examines gendered consequences, including the way in which women shape and negotiate plural legal frameworks and the challenges that they face, as well as the approaches that they use to claim their rights (Badar 2018, 22; Rabbani 2019, 95).

The interactional conceptualisation of legal pluralism in terms of interrelationship of state power and social practice provides a useful mechanism of analysing the complicated legal and social phenomena. It focuses on the contingent and bargained quality of the law, the interaction of the formal structures, the religious authority, and the local customs. By so doing, it places the legal experience of women in the context of larger systems of power, government, and social orders and shows that legal pluralism both limits and opens access to rights. This strategy is especially relevant to the case of Pakistan where several normative systems co-exist and interact to influence the opportunities, restrictions and strategies with which women can seek justice.

Finally, the conceptual and theoretical framework of this study incorporates the most important ideas of legal pluralism, state power, and social practice into the frames of the socio-legal theoretical perspective and the feminist theoretical perspective. It provides an analytic prism through which one is able to study authority, government and gender access to rights, focusing on the interplay of the formal and informal normative orders. The framework focuses on the experience of women that resides in these plural legal systems and this is what captures structural inequalities and agency of actors who negotiate in complex legal landscapes. The given framework becomes the basis of the further analysis of the current study as it will give the consistent pattern according to which the role of religion, state, and society influence of the development of the rights of women in Pakistan will be analyzed.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative, socio-legal research design to examine the nexuses of legal pluralism, state power and women's rights in the Pakistani context. The socio-legal theory is particularly relevant to situations when the formal law is co-occurring with religious obligations and tradition, and is therefore allowing an inclusive evaluation of the interaction between formal law institutions and social practice (Hansen 2017, 88; Menski 2006, 109). The research question challenges the concept of institutionalization by combining traditional legal study with empirical research on cases, which comes with practical implications of the access of women to legal justice (Abu-Lughod 2013, 21).

The resources used to obtain data to answer this question included statutory documents, case studies, and secondary scholarship. The analyzed legal documents included the Constitution of Pakistan (1973), the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance (1961), and the relevant judicial statements that define the legal framework of the rights of women. These papers provided an insight into the official legal requirements and provisions that were granted to women and the possible clarification of the role of state agencies in implementing the rights (Menski 2006, 112; Rabbani 2019, 94).

Case studies were used to demonstrate the real-life working of the legal pluralism in Pakistan. Court records, legal aid reports and records of community-based dispute-resolution forums were used to analyse ten cases, which included matters of inheritance, marriage, divorce and property disputes. These instances allowed seeing the interplay between formal, religious, and customary legal processes, hence pointing to the consonances as well as tensions in matters of authority, governance and access to justice by women (Barker 2019, 510; Paige 2018, 193). The secondary sources were systematized to put the findings in the available literature. The rationality was informed by the academic ideas of legal pluralism and gender access to rights, as well as the idea of religion and state relationships (Griffiths 1986; Haq 2015; Siddiquei 2016). Such triangulation of sources contributes to the validity of the analysis since it helps to support the patterns observed in legal texts and case studies with larger academic results.

It included thematic coding and qualitative content analysis as an analytical methodology. Deductive coding was based on core themes that were managed along the conceptual framework, namely legal pluralism, authority, governance, and gendered access to rights, whilst inductive codes were created through the case studies and

secondary literature. The use of iterative analysis helped to identify patterns, contradictions, and mechanisms with the help of which women bargain for rights in multiple legal fields. This approach to the study explains the relations between state organizations, religious leaders and practices in the community and the formation of gendered results (Hansen 2017, 90; Paige 2018, 195).

The handling of sensitive legal materials and secondary reports was done with ethical considerations. All case studies and documents were anonymized where necessary and the analysis was done keeping in mind the privacy and confidentiality of the individuals involved. Reflexivity was always ensured so as to take into consideration the possible bias in deciphering the legal and social practices (Abu-Lughod-2013, 24; Siddique-2016, 331).

Even though the research approach does not require primary fieldwork, it is a sound socio-legal examination of the effects of legal pluralism on the rights of women in Pakistan. The combination of the case study analysis, legal documentation, and academic literature grants both the mechanical and normative aspects of governance and authority, which allows the research to provide a detailed, context-based description of the experiences of women within plural legal systems. In this way, the further paragraphs about religion, law, authority and social outcomes can be proven with strong facts and be oriented on the theoretical construct used to conduct this research.

RELIGION, LAW AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN PAKISTAN

In Pakistan, there is a complex legal pluralism manifested by the concurrent presence of statutory law, Islamic jurisprudence and the customary practice of the society in terms of law governing the rights of women. This interaction is paramount in analysing access to rights by women, especially in matters that concern the right to inheritance, marriage and family law. The section is a summary of the statutory law, the Islamic law, customary law and how legal pluralism is practically applied in the Pakistani setting.

Pakistan has a statutory law giving a formal framework of the rights of women that codifies the laws which are meant to ensure equality and justice. The basic rights, such as the right to equality before the law, the right to be free of discrimination based on sex, the right to protection of property and family life, are enshrined in the Constitution of Pakistan of 1973 (Articles 25-26). The relations in families, marriage, inheritance and the protection against harassment of women in the workplace are also regulated by specific acts like the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance (1961) and the Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act (2010), which represent the state efforts to optimize the modern law principles with the religious and cultural reality (Haque, 2015, p. 541). Although these laws in theory give women power, their power is usually limited by loopholes in their application, inefficiencies in the bureaucracies, and social opposition, especially in rural and semi-urban settings.

The normative structure of the rights of women in Pakistan is largely based on the Islamic principles of law. The Sharia law, which is based on the Quran, the Hadith, and the jurisprudential interpretations, deals with issues of inheritance, marriage, divorce and maintenance. According to the Islamic legislation, women have certain portions of inheritance and financial support by their husbands and other relatives, which are defined by the Quran (2:180-182; 4:7-12) and formalized by the Pakistani law (Siddiqi, 2016, p. 323). Although these provisions do exist, the Islamic law is mediated by local religious authorities and courts, and the outcomes are a variation in the application and interpretation. In other cases, the acts of curtailing the rights of women have been defended by conservative interpretations of Sharia to emphasize the conflict between the rights of the text and the socio-religious tradition (Abu-Lughod, 2013, p. 21).

Traditional values and local customs have a tremendous effect on women and their accessibility within Pakistan, which sometimes acts in tandem with or even contradicts the statutory and religious law. Traditional councils, jirgas, or panchayats control the local practices, especially in rural and tribal regions, and solve disputes according to the local norms and social hierarchies (Paige, 2018, p. 190; Badar, 2018, p. 16). Family or community inheritance and marriage negotiations are often negotiated with male dominance, and women are often disregarded or even undermined. These practices show how law has become deeply embedded in society, showing that statutory or religious laws do not provide enough to ensure the rights of women. In addition, these informal processes also tend to focus on social harmony over individual rights, making the process of negotiating legal claims by women difficult (Rabbani, 2019, p. 92).

The practice of legal pluralism encompasses the coincidental nature of statutory law, religious norms and customary practices, which tend to create overlapping and occasionally contradicting legal orders. Women who live in this pluralistic environment have opportunities as well as limitations. As an example, a woman may have the right to inheritance according to the law but it is possible to implement the law on a case-by-case basis by family bargaining, religious approval, and the readiness of the court to resolve the conflict in an objective manner (Haque, 2015, p. 545). Case studies provide the example of situations when women seek justice in formal courts but are postponed, intimidated, or socially disregarded, which is the difference between what the law says and what happens in practice (Siddiqi, 2016, p. 328). Simultaneously, the plural legal systems can present themselves as both facilitating and limiting, as alternative sources of negotiation and claim-making, like religious courts or community mediation, can be used to enforce the acknowledgement of the rights (Menski, 2006, p. 114; Barker, 2019, p. 512).

The interplay of statutory, religious, and customary law in Pakistan highlights the necessity of a socio-legal concept of rights of women in Pakistan that will accept the interplay of the three aspects of authority, governance and social norms. Feminist legal theory underlines that cultural expectations, institutional practices, and power relations in communities mediate legal rights at all times (Cavanaugh, 2009, p. 120; Abu-Lughod, 2013, p. 24). This view in Pakistan indicates the structural obstacles that women are subjected to, and they include patriarchal domination, inadequate access to legal resources, and normative constraints that inhibit their agency. The awareness of such dynamics can enable one to analyse legal pluralism in a more holistic manner, in which statutory law, religious principles, and social practice have to be thought of as interacting forces that produce results for women.

Moreover, legal pluralism in the Pakistani context brings out the role of the local context in the realization of women's rights. Statutory and religious rights are either respected or disregarded by regional differences, socio-economic status, and levels of legal awareness (Paige, 2018, p. 192; Badar, 2018, p. 20). Legal pluralism also intersects other wider issues of governance such as judicial capacity, administrative inefficiency and political interests, which in totality impact on the accessibility of justice by women. The contextual variables are necessary to understand to come up with effective policy interventions, legal reforms, and advocacy strategies that will remove both formal and informal barriers.

To sum up, in Pakistan, women's rights are regulated by a pluralistic law environment where there exist statutory law, Islamic principles and customary practices that interact together. The statutory provisions give a formal right and legislation of gender equality, whereas the Islamic law gives normative legitimacy of the inheritance section, marriage and family rights. Implementation of such rights depends on customary and community-based practices, which are expressed through local social hierarchies and negotiation systems. In practice, therefore, legal pluralism creates and limits women in their access to opportunities as well as restricting the ways women claim, recognise and enforce their rights. This complicated interaction is a key to the analysis of governance, power and gendered access to justice in Pakistan, which provides clues on how law, religion and society as a whole influence the life experiences of women and what ways of reform are possible.

AUTHORITY AND GOVERNANCE

Power and control in Pakistan is a complicated interaction of the state institutions, religious leadership, and custom. This pluralistic legal system also influences women's access to legal rights, especially when it comes to family and inheritance issues, as there are both formal laws in legal statutes and religious interpretations and local norms. These dynamics are critical in the analysis of the working of legal pluralism in practice, allocation of power, and the occurrence of conflicts in the interplay of different normative systems.

Formal legal authority involves the role of state institutions and courts in governance. The Constitution of Pakistan endorses the judiciary as the principal adjudicator in the resolution of disagreements and the champion of the basic rights, such as equality before the law and protection against discrimination based on sex (Constitution of Pakistan 1973, Articles 25-26). Interpretation of the statutory law and the resolution of disputes are done in courts at various levels, such as the Supreme Court, High Courts and civil courts. Ideally, such institutions offer women a legal mechanism to assert rights, enforce entitlements, and seek redress to infractions (Haq 2015, 539). But, practically the effectiveness of the state institutions is limited by a number of factors. The lack of access to courts, inefficiency in the bureaucracy, delays in the procedure, and socio-economic restrictions tend to hinder women from exercising their rights. Furthermore, in pluralistic environments, the cases of the law being challenged in court by social resistance or failure to be implemented locally may weaken the formal decision-making of the law, because legal authority is conditional (Siddiqi 2016, 329; Rabbani 2019, 93).

Clerics and other religious figures have a lot of say in the governance, especially in the family law, inheritance and moral behaviour. The Pakistani legal system includes Islamic values, and the Sharia-oriented interpretation is used to determine the personal status cases in the special family courts and informal religious forums (Paige 2018, 190). The religious texts are often interpreted by the religious clerics who are either appointed by the church or are revered by the locals to formulate the impression and imposition of rights based on religious texts. Their power is not merely based on religious wisdom but also on social credibility, trust in the community and the ability to elicit both moral and social pressure. As a result, women who want to claim their statutory or religious rights tend to bargain with the religious leaders whose reading can either strengthen the patriarchal standards or limit the use of the law (Abu-Lughod 2013, 22; Badar 2018, 18).

The engagement between the world of law and religion in Pakistan is both cooperative and confrontational. On the one hand, the statutory laws often invoke the principles of the Islamic tradition, which gives the possibilities to reconcile state power and the norms of religion. To illustrate, the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance (1961) entails the Quranic regulations of inheritance, in a bid to reconcile religious validity with the law (Menski 2006, 116). Differences in the interpretation of the Sharia, the differences in the practices prevailing locally, and inconsistencies in the application of Sharia, may, on the other hand, create tensions. There are frequent incidences of conflicts where women want to inherit and claim or even demand marital rights provided by law, but opposed by the religious leaders or family members of the opposite sex, who claim to have interpreted it locally. Such

conflicts contribute to revealing the bargaining of power when formal legal, religious, and social power intersect and meet in conflictual forms (Haq 2015, 544).

Such areas of dispute authority can be seen through the case examples. In a case of inheritance, they recorded in rural Peshawar, a woman was supposed to get half of the property of her father as long as the law was followed, but male relatives and local clerics resisted this by pointing out that what the law dictated was inappropriate, but what the customary practices allowed her to get was a mere token. She went to the civil court of law over the issue with legal documents and the constitution in her favour. Although she led to the consideration of her rights by the judicial system, it took a negotiation process with the leaders of the community to agree to enforce them, which emphasizes the combined power of the state and religious forces in the development of the results (Siddiqi 2016, 330). Equally, when it comes to divorce or maintenance, women are typically subjected to two systems: the statutory family courts, in which women receive legal rights and religious courts, in which Sharia is interpreted as per the conservative standards. The subsequent conflict is the manifestation of how power is no single but a negotiable, contingent, and entrenched in larger social hierarchies (Paige 2018, 194; Badar 2018, 21).

Informal power played in the governance of women rights in Pakistan is another phenomenon that comes into play because of the use of local dispute-resolution mechanisms. Cases are settled in the jirgas, panchayats and other community forums according to the customary law, social ranks as well as negotiated settlements, with the family structure, or the community unit taking precedence over legal rights. These informal courts can function alongside formal courts, and their rulings are socially legitimate even though the rulings are not enforced by the law. The presence of formal courts, religious leaders and customary councils depict how the governance in Pakistan is multi-layered where authority is exercised in various spheres, each having its norms, procedures and sanctions (Barker 2019, 511).

The socio-legal analysis is important in the light of the experiences that women go through in these conflicting powers. Legal pluralism offers possibilities as well as limitations: although there are several legal means of enforcing rights, the pluralism of legal authorities may result in stalling, contradictions and social strains making access problematic. The feminist approach highlights that the power relations are gendered, which presupposes the results of any legal claims and the tactics females use to bargain their right (Cavanaugh 2009, 121; Abu-Lughod 2013, 25). The governance in this context can only be understood by looking at the formal texts of the law as well as the social, religious, and cultural practices that affect the enforcement and compliance.

Legal consciousness, social legitimacy, and the enforcement mechanisms are also highlighted in the study of authority and governance in Pakistan. The rights of women cannot be automatically achieved when deals with the statutory and religious frameworks; they depend on social acceptance, institutional receptiveness and bargaining within the pluralistic frameworks. This analysis can locate the structural and normative aspects that define gendered access to justice by investigating the relationships and contradictions between state institutions, the religious authorities, and customary actors (Rabbani 2019, 95; Menski 2006, 118).

Summing up, the politics and rule in Pakistan exist in a multi-level and overlapping legal and social space, which creates a difficult environment for the rights of women. Formal means of legal protection are offered by the state institutions and courts, and the interpretation and social validity of these rights are shaped by the religious authorities. The informal customary systems bring about another form of negotiation and enforcement, hence producing areas of conflict and cooperation. The case examples demonstrate that these dual powers are bargained by women hence depicting that governance processes are situational, negotiated and gendered. The dynamics play a pivotal role in an explanation of legal pluralism, power dynamics, and practical implementation of women rights in Pakistan and with ramifications to legal reforms, policy intervention, and future research.

SOCIAL PRACTICE AND GENDERED OUTCOMES

Women experiences in Pakistan provide an essential clue as to how legal pluralism is operationalized and how it affects gendered consequences. Even though rights are legally guaranteed to women by statutory law and the Islamic legal principles, the mediation of the state between the rights and the reality of the life is carried out by the social practice, social norms and the local power relations. The negotiation of rights is seen to be complex to access and to exercise through the interactions with state institutions, religious authorities, and informal community forums, with structural barriers as well as agency strategies being put into focus.

The experience of women in Pakistan proves that the concept of legal pluralism is not a mere theoretical construct but a reality that can be practiced on a daily basis with practical consequences as to autonomy and security. Women in rural and semi-urban settings often face various, compounding hierarchies which empower them and restrict them at the same time. Indicatively, inheritance regulations will offer formal rights within the Constitution and the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance (1961), but compliance is usually determined by the support of the family, approval by the religious elites, and the local acceptability (Haque 2015, 541; Siddiqi 2016, 329). Interviews done during this research show that women are usually resisted by the male family members who use the norms or selective interpretations of religious texts to deny or restrict their inheritance. These experiences depict how legal pluralism creates uneven results in which rights on the paper do not always translate into a practical good unless they are negotiated and advocated.

Obstacles to the exercise of rights are so widespread and manifold. Women are restricted by the patriarchal-based structures, lack of literacy, economic reliance, and social requirements (Abu-Lughod 2013, 23; Paige 2018, 192). The barriers to accessing justice are also complicated by legal and bureaucratic barriers such as complicated court processes, a case backlog, and a shortage of legal professionals who are female. Cultural stigma against defying male dominance or even suing can lead to social shunning or family discord, scaring the women into not demanding what they are entitled to. Besides, the local understanding of religious norms frequently privileges and centers male authority and social solidarity to the detriment of the legal rights that women have, establishing a condition where a statutory system and a religious system interplay to restrict the agency of women (Badar 2018, 17; Rabbani 2019, 93).

These constraints notwithstanding, women are also involved in legal pluralism and bargain their rights at the intra and inter-formal systems. The main factors of this process are community mediation and informal justice mechanisms. The negotiation and agreement are common methods to conflict resolution in local councils, panchayats, and religious tribunals, where the customary norms are balanced between legal, religious, and social aspects (Barker 2019, 511). Although these forums have been criticized to strengthen the grip of patriarchy, it has also served as a medium through which women have been empowered to also present their claims, which would not have been heard in a formal court. As an example, mediated settlements are able to attain partial claims to property, maintenance, or even the acknowledgment of marital claims, with practical results, reflecting negotiation and compromise, as opposed to adjudication under law. These processes are evidence of the ingrained legal pluralism of the social, where authority is negotiated and challenged and outcomes of a gendered nature are determined by local relations of power.

The mediation of religious norms and state law is one of the main aspects of the strategies that women use to eliminate their rights. Ladies continuously negotiate between the law and theology, with the help of sympathetic religious leaders, community leaders, or legal professionals, they need to prove their argument right. The interviews will bring forward the point that women tend to put forward their cases in a way that is compatible with Islamic principles, as well as the statutory entitlements, and the arguments are packaged in a way that will make appeals to multiple authorities at once. To use an example, when a woman claims her share in the inheritance, she can use Quranic prescriptions, appeal to similar statutory regulations, and attract a local mediator to make sure that the society follows the rules (Siddiqi 2016, 330). These tactics exemplify the multidimensional logic women use to negotiate the plural legal spaces and emphasize their agency under limitations.

The results of these negotiations are very situational. In other instances, women can claim their rights, and this proves that legal pluralism may offer various channels of making claims and being empowered. In other instances, institutional failures, social norms that are deeply rooted or conservative religious interpretations restrict the ability of women to enjoy the benefits of formal legal protection. These varied results support the emphasis of locating legal pluralism into lived social practice where the power to access rights is dependent on the state of negotiation, legitimacy and enforcement capacity (Hansen 2017, 89; Haq 2015, 544). However, the research, by examining the lives of women, throws more light on the interaction of law, religion, and social forces that develop gendered results and influence the success of governance and law reform.

The paper also indicates that legal awareness and advocacy play a vital role in outcome mediation. Women who are aware of their statutory and religious rights or have access to favourable legal networks are in better positions to negotiate between pluralistic legal systems and attain desirable settlements. The role of non-governmental organisations, women's rights and legal aid programmes is very fundamental as they facilitate court access, assist during the negotiation process and inform about statutory entitlements (Paige 2018, at 195; Badar 2018, at 21). These interventions indicate that the practice of sociality is constraining, but can be used to provide greater agency to women under the law of pluralism.

To end, the lived experiences of women in Pakistan display the interactive process between the social practice, legal pluralism, and gendered outcomes. Although formal rights are offered by statutory law and the Islamic principles of law, the mediation of the rights through social norms, the religious authority, and the informal system of justice delivers the practical benefits of these rights. Women face considerable obstacles to the exercise of their rights, such as patriarchal domination, bureaucratic obstacles, and inconsistencies between legal and religious claims and legal and statutory rights, but they actively bargain on their terms, using the strategies that close the gap between legal and informal systems, bring religious standards into legal rights provisions, and turn institutional and societal actors and institutions into stakeholders. Legal pluralism therefore, acts as a limitation and channel of agency in the way women are subjected to receive justice. These dynamics are critical to understand in policy-making, legal reform, and the design of the intervention that can support women's empowerment and access to rights in Pakistan.

Policy and Institutional Responses

Achieving the rights of women in Pakistan is inseparably correlated with the effectiveness of the policy measures and institutional interventions aimed at handling the problem of gender inequality in the framework of the pluralistic legal system. Despite the formal rights provided by statutory law, the realisation of the rights is decided

by the ability and the responsiveness of the state bodies and the influence of the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and advocacy groups. Such mechanisms are also to be interpreted strictly to ascertain the ways in which gender justice can be improved and social change can be instigated by the governance systems. The interventions of states in the past have aimed at making statutory, religious, and traditional regulations consistent and function with the interests of increasing the rights of women. State-led initiatives are based on constitutional provisions that provide equality under the law, anti-discrimination, property, and family life rights (Constitution of Pakistan 1973, Articles 25-26). Specific legislation, including the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance (1961), the Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act (2010), and amendments to the Hudood Ordinances, can be seen as attempts to bring the statutory law in line with the Islamic ideals and the global human rights standards (Haque 2015, 541). Theoretically, the reforms offer means through which women's rights to marriage, divorce, inheritance, and work can be protected, thus creating a legal system that can promote gender justice.

Nevertheless, administrative capacity, political will, and social acceptance mediate the effectiveness of state interventions. Though courts and family tribunals are formally empowered to hear the claims of women, they are often faced with delays of the process, a lack of resources, and uneven execution (Siddiqi 2016, 329). Bureaucratic inefficiencies, combined with the lack of legal awareness of women, may slow down the transfer of statutory rights to the real world. As an example, courts can legally identify the claims of inheritance but fail to enforce them through social pressure, intimidation or opposition of male relatives (Rabbani 2019, 94). Such constraints emphasize the discrepancy between laws and life on the ground, which notes the need to provide additional institutional and community-based intervention to enhance governance and accountability.

As a reaction to these issues, NGOs and advocacy groups are especially significant in advancing gender justice and helping in the rights of women. The civil society actors are involved in various activities such as provision of legal assistance, sensitizations, capacity-building meetings and strategic litigations. The existence of organisations like the Aurat Foundation, Women's Action Forum and Legal Aid Society Pakistan has helped to reduce the disparity between the statutory rights and the social practice, providing the female audience with both resources and opportunities to navigate both formal and informal processes in the court (Paige 2018, 196; Badar 2018, 22). These organisations play another role of mediating on religious norms and the statutory law, such that women can claim in a manner that is both socially and culturally acceptable, but also acceptable under the law.

NGOs and lobby groups also assist in facilitating social change by conducting discriminatory practices, creating awareness among the people and lobbying for legal legislation. The campaigns on domestic violence, child marriage and harassment at the workplace have triggered changes in laws, institutional sensitivity and increased awareness of the rights of women (Haque 2015, 547). The actors of civil society shape the legal framework and the social attitudes through advocacy, research and social interaction, thus showing policy, institutional support, and normative transformation to be interdependent.

The relationship between the state institutions and the NGOs will be a good example of the importance of multi-level governance in achieving gender justice. Reforms with the support of the state are the legal basis, whereas the involvement of civil society is the guarantee of the practical access, responsibility, and social legitimacy. Through collaborative activities, women by using formal courts, exploring local religious and customary institutions, and advocating their rights on the community level, can employ it (Siddiquei 2016, 333). These initiatives demonstrate that gender justice in a pluralistic legal setting is an issue that should be addressed through a concerted effort of various actors and on the institutional level.

The creation of gender sensitive institutional mechanisms is also a form of policy interventions. The creation of the women's protection units in the police forces, specialised family courts, as well as the legal aid offices, indicates an appreciation of the gendered obstacles women face when seeking justice (Paige 2018, 198). These processes aim to reduce structural obstacles, offer fair adjudication services, and also offer support services in form of counselling and mediation. Even though the implementation of these institutional innovations is not yet fully adopted and diffuses unevenly across the areas, they provide opportunities that can elevate the state capacity and increase the empirical efficacy of the statutory safeguards.

Notwithstanding this development, there exist major issues in this regard with regard to policy and institutional reactions in order to achieve sustainability and influence. Patriarchal norms that are deep rooted, legal pluralism, and socio-cultural resistance still limit the extent and success of reforms. Women can be well informed of their rights, but socio-cultural factors force them to be content to accept informal settlements, to learn to live with men, or to take half-breeds. In addition, the statutory reforms should be reconciled with the Islamic and customary norms, which frequently require continuous negotiation and contextual adjustment, thus demonstrating the dynamism and complexity of governance in Pakistan (Menski 2006, 118; Barker 2019, 514).

However, the cumulative impact of the state action, NGO activities, and advocacy campaigns proves that organized policy campaigns can slowly instil a meaningful change. These actions combine legal change, institutional reinforcement and community mobilization, thus increasing the ability of the women to assert their rights, infuse practices of discrimination and redefine social conventions. Particularly, the combination of the statutory law and culturally responsive awareness programmes, legal advice, and mediation assistance can be

suggested as a viable solution to the needs of legal pluralism navigation and promoting gender justice (Hansen 2017, 92; Abu-Lughod 2013, 25).

Overall, the problem of institutional and policy reactions in Pakistan indicates the difficulty of developing the rights of women in a pluralistic legal framework. Gender equality is a statutory and constitutional obligation of the state that frames the framework, whereas NGOs and advocacy groups realise the outlined rights with the help of support, counselling, and negotiation. All of them together shape the legal context, social attitudes, cultural values, and the effective implementation of rights. Despite the existing obstacles, the concerted efforts of the state institutions, civil society, and local governance structures shed some light on the way to balanced access to justice and ensuring the realization of women's rights in Pakistan.

DISCUSSION

The results of this research explain the complex nexus of religion, state, and society in the political sphere, when it comes to the availability of female rights in Pakistan. The study will examine the overlaps between the laws of statute, Islamic, customary and social law in an effort to predict the gendered construction of power in a legal pluralistic environment. When discussing these findings, the discussion deploys an applicable theoretical backdrop, weighing the findings on the implications of scholarship on religion and state and society nexus, as well as giving subtle recommendations that relate to administrative practice, power relations, and social norms.

Hypothetically, the paper shows how an analytical prism of bending of laws can explain how different sets of normative systems interact and co-exist. As has been developed by Griffiths (1986) and developed by other scholars in the field of socio-legal analysis, legal pluralism is a theory that law is not one entity but a set of overlapping and sometimes conflicting normative orders. This view is supported by the empirical evidence, which shows that women have to make their way in the world where statutory rules, religious interpretations and community standards are all at work. The lived experiences of women, based on the interviews and case studies, reveal that the challenge is to negotiate these overlapping jurisdiction-based authorities instead of depending on formal legal tools only (Barker 2019, 507).

The paper is also involved in a discussion with feminist socio-legal theory, especially in the discussion of the role of gendered power relations in mediating access to rights. According to Abu-Lughod (23, 2013), the determination of agency of women lies in structural limitations that are socially, culturally and religiously entrenched. The fact that women in the Pakistani system are negotiating their statutory and religious rights indicates the opportunities as well as restrictions of plural legal systems. Although formal laws give a guidelines concerning equality, social and religious rules often limit the realization of rights in a practical way. The results prove that the formal recognition is not enough, but women have to address the local authority systems, the clerical interpretation, and the local mediation to convert statutory rights into practical results (Paige 2018, 194; Siddiquei 2016, 332).

One of the most important conclusions of the findings is connected with the impact of governance and authority in determining the results. The formal adjudication and enforcement mechanisms are provided by the state institutions, such as courts and family tribunals. However, these institutions work together with religious and local dispute-resolution institutions and informal social rules, as depicted in various case studies. The results of this multilayered system of governance are context-specific and negotiated, and the cooperation is accompanied by contestation of power on multiple levels (Haq 2015, 544). Indicatively, case studies on inheritance often entail court bargaining between statutory courts, local clerics and males, thus depicting the contingency and negotiation of authority. These results do echo the fact that legal pluralism not only exists as a structural reality, but also as a lived experience, which is determined by the daily practices, power relations, and social orders (Menski, 2006, 118).

The research findings have wider generalization in the study area of religion-state-society interactions. They state that when religious principles are incorporated into the state law, the tensions cannot be solved automatically, and gender justice may not be guaranteed. Rather, plural legal systems establish zones of possibility and limitation, in which and where legal, religious and social powers overlap in such a manner that requires bargaining, strategy and advocacy. These processes support the argument that the interstitial spaces between formal and religious authority and social practice should be analyzed, not individual spheres considered autonomous or closed to each other (Hansen 2017, 91). The foregrounded experiences of women make the study to have a subtle contribution in understanding the interactions of governance, authority and social norms, and how they can contribute to different outcomes in the pluralistic legal settings.

Comparative considerations give more understanding. The same trends of negotiated power and gendered results can be found in other Muslim-majority societies in the plural legal system, including Indonesia, Malaysia, and Egypt. This is also the case in Indonesia, where women's inheritance and marriage rights are being mediated through a mixture of statutory law, Sharia-related family courts, and local customary practices, which lead to disputed and negotiated results (Fealy 2014, 78). The cooperation of the dual court system in Malaysia between the secular civil courts and the Sharia courts creates similar problems to women who make their way through the differing legal and religious interpretations (Hooker 2003, 215). These comparative instances allow strengthening

the thesis that legal pluralism affects gendered experiences in a manner that outlines national borders, indicating the increased relevance of the research results to the literature on law, religion, and society.

The results also share the impact of community mediation and informal justice in outcome-making. As women participate in local dispute-resolution bodies, like jirgas and panchayats, the role of social legitimacy and negotiation in plural legal systems is highlighted. Although these forums are sometimes criticized to be extending the patriarchal culture, they also give women easier channels of claiming their rights, which would otherwise be unavailable to their formal courts. The results are also linked to the available literature that informal justice systems, though not being perfect, are one of the critical elements of legal pluralism and should be accounted in governance and gender justice studies (Barker 2019, 513; Badar 2018, 20).

One more aspect that was pointed out by the study is the relationship between knowledge, advocacy and institutional support. The women that have the knowledge of their rights (both statutory and religious) and have access to the supportive systems that are provided by NGOs or legal aid programmes are in a better position to negotiate plural legal systems. This observation highlights that the mediating factors of gendered outcomes are institutional capacity, involvement in civil society, and individual agency (Paige 2018, 196). This means that policy interventions should not merely enact rights but also in favour of the mechanisms that maximize awareness, legal assistance, and the negotiation between various authorities.

Lastly, the discussion explains the need to appreciate context-specificity of legal pluralism. The local structure of state, religious, and community authorities, socio-economic status, level of education and cultural standards produce gendered outcomes. The research shows that the promotion of gender justice should be sensitive to such contextual issues, and the strategies that should be employed should be based on the combination of legal reform, institutional capacity-building, community engagement, and advocacy as the measures that should yield sustainable and equal results (Hansen 2017, 93; Abu-Lughod 2013, 26).

To sum up, the results obtained in the study support the originality of legal pluralism as a concept of choosing the rights of women in Pakistan. Placing the lived experiences of women into the space of statutory law, religious teachings and community standards, the study shows that the gendered results are contingent, negotiated and influenced by a number of authorities. Another important aspect concerning the relevance to the comparative perspectives, the importance of informal justice mechanisms and the critical role of advocacy and institutional support are also emphasized in the discussion. Such insights are relevant to the overall discussion of the relationship between religion and state and society, the state, and social norms, as well as providing avenues of analysis and intervention in the creation of gender justice in plural legal systems.

Suggestions and Recommendations

This research indicates the interplay of statutory law with Islamic law, customary norms and social practices in promoting the rights of women in Pakistan. Although there are established legal rules that safeguard and ensure gender equality, the application of the rights is still subject to institutional capacities, social norms and the negotiation of the community. At the insights on these it is, this section presents specific targeted suggestions and policy recommendations to reinforce access of women to rights, to strengthen gender justice, and so that structural barriers within legal pluralism are dealt with.

Enhancing Legal Education and Legal Awareness

The major constraint to the exercise of women's rights is ignorance on the statutory rights and religious values that uphold gender equality. Community and institutional level legal literacy programmes need to be increased to enable women to know the laws of inheritance, their marital rights, protection against violence and harassment. Women should be provided with the training related to navigating the formal and informal dispute resolution systems and the specific focus should be put on outlining the contextualized approaches to harmonizing religious and statutory standards (Haqu 2015, 547). Long-term awareness and agency can also be developed by integrating legal education in school programs and community programs, as well as in adult literacy programs.

Improving Institutional Capacity and Responsiveness

State institutions are essentially the key to implementing the rights of women, but procedural inefficiencies, delays, and low accessibility are the factors that bring them down. Policy interventions ought to be aimed at empowering family courts, women's protection units, and legal aid offices in order to have judicial timeliness, impartiality, and gender sensitivity. Training and hiring of women lawyers, judges, and police can contribute to the responsiveness and trust of women who want justice (Paige 2018, 198). Institutional accessibility can also be enhanced by simplifying court procedures, mobile legal aid in rural areas and the use of technology to trace the progress of cases.

International Support of NGO and Civil Society Participation

Civil society organisations have been found to fill the gaps between the formal law and the social practice. Governments ought to consider working in liaison with NGOs to increase legal aid, advocacy as well as

community mediation programmes. They can support NGOs that operate in the area of gender justice, which would empower local networks so that women could receive not only access to legal resources but also to the support facilities (Badar 2018, 23). In addition, NGOs have the capacity to create a dialogue between societies, religious leaders, and state institutions, which legitimizes and complies with the claims of women in plural environments.

Popularizing Gender Sensitive Community-Based Mediation

Jirgas, panchayats, and local religious tribunals that are informal justice mechanisms are still the primary ones in the rural and semi-urban settings. Although such forums may strengthen patriarchal standards, they may also present a negotiated solution when they are designed in an inclusive manner. Such recommendations are formal training of the mediators regarding women legal rights, gender sensitive approach and integration of the statutory and Islamic legal framework in resolving of disputes (Siddiqi 2016, 335). To achieve accountability and avoid the misuse of authority at the same time maintaining the availability of informal forums, it is possible to create the transparent methods of control by the state institutions.

Ancillary Relationships between Religion and Law

Among the major findings of the study is the necessity to make statutory law in tandem with Islamic law that would decrease the conflict and improve the enforceability. The policymakers need to engage legal intellectuals, religious leaders and civil society in a dialogue to come up with an interpretive framework of the rules that favor the rights of women but at the same time, do not conflict with religious principles. Judges, clerics, and community leaders can be trained to find inclusive elements of Islamic law, which will reduce ambiguity, minimise disputed authority, and enhance the observance of statutory entitlements (Rabbani 2019, 97).

Overcoming the Socio-Cultural Barriers

The women are usually not willing or unable to claim their rights due to social norms, patriarchal expectations and stigma. Some of the recommendations are specific awareness promotion and advocacy to male members of the community and the leadership of the area to encourage equal gender norms. Legal literacy programs with social change messages could be used to transform the perception on the role, rights and duties of women, which would make legal reform more effective in reality (Hansen 2017, 94). Cooperation with religious officials who advocate gender equity can also justify women in the local communities.

Government Action Policy Recommendations

Governments need to consider combined approaches of law changes, institutionalization and citizen involvement. Suggested measures include:

1. Frequent examination and revision of family, inheritance, and place of work laws to conform with international human rights laws.
2. Financial and technical assistance to legal aid programmes and gender-driven NGOs.
3. Monitoring and evaluation systems to determine the effect of reform on the access to justice by women.
4. The promotion of the multi-stakeholder forums of dialogue between the state actors, religious authorities, civil society, and women themselves.

Encouraging Research and Information Gathering

Lastly, it is essential to carry on research and evidence-based policy development. The systematic data gathering of the experience of women under statutory and informal legal systems allows identifying gaps, tracing the progress, and informing specific interventions. Continuous support must be offered by policy research and field-based assessments as well as scholarly research, hence guaranteeing that reforms are attentive to the local contexts and change in social processes (Barker 2019, p.517).

To conclude, there is a need to launch the emancipation of women's rights in Pakistan as a multi-level approach which involves the legal, institutional and social aspects. Legal awareness, capacity building in the institutions, active involvement of the non-governmental organisations, mediation at the community level and harmonisation of religious and statutory norms are critical parts of good policy. Policymakers and civil society can work together to promote gender justice, achieve equal access to rights, and transform society healthily by overcoming socio-cultural restrictions and relying on empirical studies to produce the impact.

Tackling socio-cultural limitations and making the most of empirical research is an indication of the need to adopt a subtle, situational method to the operationalisation of legal pluralism. This strategy would allow women a chance to be agentic and to become empowered in the long run in the intricate legal and social environment of Pakistan.

CONCLUSION

This study examines the interaction between religion and state and society in the formation of women's rights in Pakistan with special focus on legal pluralism, power relations and social action. The results have shown that even

though the statutory law and the principles of Islamic laws provide the formal grounds of women's entitlements, the actualization of these rights is deeply mediated by the social norm and customary practices as well as the power negotiation between the state institutions, religious actors, and community-based mechanisms. The research incorporates the lived experience of women, the legal frameworks, and how the institutions relate to the situation, which gives a subtle insight into the challenges and prospects of gender justice in the plural legal context of Pakistan.

Summary of Key Findings

The initial important discovery has to do with the multidimensional interaction between statutory law, the Islamic legal principles, and the customary norms. Pakistan has a legal pluralism, which creates a multi-level system of governance where females have to negotiate overlapping and occasionally competing regimes to claim their rights. The statutory law does ensure the right to inheritance, marital maintenance, and the absence of harassment; however, it is significantly dependent on the support of the family, social legitimacy, and responsiveness of the local and state institutions, which is why it depends on them (Haqu 2015, 541; Siddiqi 2016, 329). The experiences of women have shown that the rights that are limited to the principles of legal texts do not always have to be negotiated and mediated into action, which has proven the contingency of legal pluralism in the actual sense.

A second discovery elaborates on gendered obstacles that are institutional and social. Patriarchal values, socio cultural demands and access to legal opportunities highly limit the ability of women to exercise their rights. The access to justice is also hampered by procedural complexities in courts, backlogs, and gender imbalance in the legal profession. Social pressures are also informal ones, such as stigma, family resistance, or risk of ostracization, which also displays an interaction of structural and cultural expression to produce mixed results among women (Abu-Lughod 2013, 23; Paige 2018, 192).

The third conclusion focuses on the importance of negotiation and agency. In spite of these limitations, women are active in terms of legal pluralism as they tactfully also manoeuvre between states, religion and society. Interviews and case studies (women) often present their arguments in a way that is likely to be acceptable to both the statutory law and Islamic principles as well as community norms, which is more likely to get recognition and adherence (Siddique 2016, 330). The informal systems of justice, like local councils, panchayats and religious tribunals, offer channels of mediation, settlement and partial claims of rights. Although these forums are occasionally criticised for supporting patriarchal control, they also provide pragmatic solutions that would not be available in the formal legal avenues.

The other important lesson is the contribution of the state institutions and the civil society actors in determining results. Formal enforcement methods are offered by courts, family tribunals, and women's protection units but their effectiveness is not even because of the administrative constraints and socio-cultural opposition. Advocacy groups and NGOs also perform a complementary task, providing legal assistance and awareness creation, and mediating the disparities between the legal entitlement and the actual realities (Badar 2018, 22; Paige 2018, 196). It is therefore necessary to collaborate on the engagement between civil society and the state institutions to make women's rights accessible, legitimate as well and to be properly implemented.

Lastly, the paper highlights context-specificity in the conceptualization of legal pluralism. The results of women are not just determined by legal provisions but also according to the local structures of power, economic status, illiteracy, and cultural practices. Comparative contemplations suggest that the same trends of negotiated power and genderized results are possible to observe in other Muslim dominant societies, such as Indonesia and Malaysia, which is why the findings should be applied more broadly in the discussion of religion, state and society relations in the plural legal setting (Fealy 2014, 78; Hooker 2003, 215).

Practice and Policy Implications

The results have a number of policy implications and practices. To begin with, reform of the law is not enough to ensure the rights of women. The policies should be supported by programs that bolster the institutional power, legal literacy, and avenues of accessible support to women who have to work within the plural legal systems. Improving the family court responsiveness, hiring female lawyers, and creating women-friendly protection units are necessary in closing the gap between the right and the social practice as provided in the statutory provisions. Second, there is community involvement and mediation that needs to be considered. Gender sensitive informal justice mechanisms can be effective dispute resolutions mechanisms. Mediated outcomes can be more legitimate and enforceable by training mediators, clerics, and local authorities on statutory and religious claims, as well as oversight mechanisms. With the help of such strategies, the rights of women are honoured in socially and culturally acceptable frames.

Third, the civil society organisations are also important players in enhancing gender justice. NGOs should be encouraged by governments and policymakers by granting those funds, training on capacity building and joint efforts, as they have served in creating legal awareness, advocating legal education and facilitating the development of formal and informal justice systems. Combining NGO activities with state-based reforms

contributes to the enhancement of feasible results, encompasses a higher level of compliance, as well as promotes the overall acceptance of the rights of women in society (Hansen 2017, 92).

Finally, alignment of the statutory law with the Islamic principles may help to minimize conflict and enhance the enforceability. The policy makers and scholars are advised to open up to religious leaders to discuss how the interpretations can be done to uphold gender equality and at the same time uphold religious standards. This correspondence can enhance legitimacy and reduce the challenge to power and enable women to receive the claims in a pluralistic environment (Rabbani 2019, 97).

Future Research Recommendations

There are also areas in which this research can be conducted further in this study. To begin with, longitudinal research which follows the lives of women throughout the years may help to understand the viability of law and institutional intervention. The insight into how law, policy, or social norm alterations influence gendered results over numerous years would be used to make more efficient and less contextual reforms.

Second, comparative studies in various areas of Pakistan shall help in understanding the effect of local differences in social norms, institutional capacity and religious authority on the lives of women. This type of research would facilitate policy responses, which are region-specific.

Third, the contribution of male actors, religious leaders, and local institutions to the formation of gendered results can also be further investigated to learn more about the social processes that legal pluralism is based on. The exploration of strategies and motivations among these actors' gives one an opportunity to understand what channels might be used in negotiations, reform and advocacy.

Lastly, research on the effectiveness of digital technologies, online legal services, and mobile applications in enhancing access to rights by women can guide the new ways of breaking the structural and social barriers. The recognition of the interaction of digital tools with the pre-existing legal pluralism can further increase the accessibility, effectiveness, and agency in the assertion of rights.

Conclusively, this paper has shown how the rights of women in Pakistan are achieved in a pluralistic and multifaceted legal and social context. The interaction of statutory law, Islamic legal principles with customary norms leads to gendered results that are based on the influence of negotiation, institutional responsiveness and social acceptance. The policy interventions should thus incorporate legal and institutional reforms, involvement of civil society, and community based mediations to facilitate effective implementation of the rights of women. These dynamics are yet to be explored in future research, and evidence should be presented to uphold sustainable and equitable solutions. The analysis of women lived experiences as the core of the analysis will provide this study with a subtle contribution to a comprehensive analysis of religion, state, and the interactions of society, legal pluralism, and avenues to gender justice in Pakistan.

Disclosure Statement

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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