

Culture as a Barrier: Political Rights of Women in Pakhtun Society

Authors : Muhammad Adil

Abstract : Women in different parts of the world confront several barriers to accomplishing their legal rights, particularly political rights. One of the common barriers in this respect is the indigenous culture of the locality. In the same way, women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are facing difficulties in accomplishing their political rights. The most significant obstacle in this context is Pakhtunwali, the traditional code of conduct in Pakhtun society, which is perceived as a substantial impediment for Pakhtun women in practicing their political rights as guaranteed by the Constitution of Pakistan and international legal instruments. Several codes of Pakhtunwali, like peggoh (slander or abuse), tor (blame or disgraced), sharam (shame and dishonor), purdah (gender segregation), and ghayrat (honor) have a prominent role in this regard. The research approach employed a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods to ensure a thorough exploration of the subject. Not only different documents have been analyzed but also a questionnaire has been developed to get accurate findings. Simultaneously, both primary and secondary data have been utilized. The finding shows that the Pakhtun culture is a formidable hurdle in accomplishing women's political rights in Pakhtun society, particularly in rural areas. Observation reveals that a prevailing societal perception is that having women as their representatives would be viewed as a challenge to the honor of Pakhtun men. Consequently, women candidates who participated in the general elections in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa received only 1 percent or less than 1 percent of the votes compared to their male counterparts. It is recommended that certain codes of Pakhtunwali should be redefined and made compatible with international legal instruments.

Keywords : constitution, fundamental rights, honor, pakhtunwali.

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