



Economic Importance of Gendered Reparations: Quantifying Sangchatti's Role in Tribal Dispute Systems of Rural Khairpur

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Abstract

This study investigates the entrenched practice of Sangchatti the compensatory exchange of women to settle tribal disputes in District Khairpur, Sindh. Against the backdrop of Pakistan's alarming gender inequality (ranked 153/156 globally), the research explores how economic deprivation, including poverty, unemployment, and resource scarcity, drives tribal conflicts that result in systemic violence against women. Practices such as honour killings, forced marriages (Vanni), and domestic violence are examined as interconnected outcomes of these socio-economic dynamics. Employing an explanatory sequential mixed-methods approach, the study collected quantitative data from 85 respondents using structured questionnaires to determine prevalence and identify economic correlates. This was followed by qualitative interviews with 7 key informants tribal elders, survivors, and local officials to uncover the socio-cultural narratives underpinning Sangchatti. The integration of both datasets revealed that resource disputes over land and water often culminate in the exchange of women as conflict-resolution tools, particularly during times of environmental or economic stress. Findings indicate that Sangchatti is not merely a cultural relic but functions as a systemic economic mechanism, reinforced by patriarchal power structures and tribal hierarchies. Survivor testimonies expose how women are commodified and stripped of autonomy, especially during crises. The study's originality lies in framing Sangchatti through a political economy lens, linking material deprivation with gender-based violence. This research offers valuable policy insights, advocating for integrated development and gender justice programs that address the root economic causes of such violence. It also provides a framework for scholars and NGOs to analyze and challenge customary practices through structural analysis, with implications for gender rights and social reform in South Asia.

Keywords: Sangchatti, Tribal Conflict, Gender Violence, Economic Deprivation, Khairpur, Forced Marriage, Political Economy, Pakistan, Women's Rights, Patriarchy, Customary Law, South Asia

Introduction

Dayan (2021) asserts that cultural examination of violence against women or femicide needs to be carried out in the background of the informal legal system, cultural stereotypes, poverty and low social status, recent postulated indicators yet need to be empirically validated and thoroughly explored. A woman has culturally liability in general in Pakistani society and in particular in Sindhi society. The majority of husbands, mothers-in-law and even wives pray and prioritize sons. A man killed his week-old daughter because he badly wished to have a son, who could help him in breadwinning in future in Mianwali, Punjab, the hometown of former Prime Minister Imran Khan (Shakil, 2021). Poverty, unemployment, and Low socio-economic status are important factors that promote violence against women in developing societies. Pakistan is the third most violent and dangerous country for women in the world and ranked 153rd out of 156 countries in women's rights in the gender gap index, with a score of thousands being killed under the umbrella of honour killing, exchanged in *Sangchatti*, *Vanni* and force marriages further pointed out that some 90 percent women suffer one another kind of domestic violence in their lives (Iqbal, 2021). To keep women and land are considered as a sign of victory and to exploit them as a thing of a commodity is a deeply rooted concept in the societal, political, and economic texture of rural Sindh. Poor policing and a weak judicial grip on the situation further aggravate the situation. The factors causing *Sangchatti* are low economic status, property, precious pieces of land, denying a woman the right of inheritance and getting a specific woman in return (*Sangchatti*). Wealth and valuables transferred from one generation to another as an inheritance are very common everywhere in the world; however, the most valuable possession in tribal culture is land. Males tend to enjoy all the social and legal possessions of deceased parents, while female inheritance is a taboo topic; almost all of them will have to surrender their Islamic and lawful share in favour of male members of a family under the slogan of "preserving the forefather's inheritance". At the time of marriage, *Daaj* (Dowry) is an unofficial final share of a daughter as inheritance, and further, they are told their brothers will help in times of misery. So, the possession of land is a matter of life and death for a tribal man. The dispute among the tribes mostly takes place due to land possessions, and in the majority of cases, they end with *Karo Kari* (Honour killing), and *Sangchatti* (Compensation Marriages). Conflicts later on led parties to *Waderas* (feudal lords) for their tribal reconciliation (*Faislo system*). It helps a tribal leader to perpetuate his influence over the tribe's men through his role as a binding force.

In most tribal conflicts subsequent killing of a female member is part of a design to inflict revenge and pain on an enemy for land and financial purposes. The *Faislo* system thus turns into an important institute for striking favourable deals among the tribesmen with the association of the tribal chief. The life of an accused can only be spared if he hands over one or more women along with other monitorial penalties. The responsibility of a *Wadera* is to address the grievances of both parties find a working solution and keep abiding aggressor and aggrieved with *Fatwa* (Decree), no party can refuse to acknowledge the verdict, and in case of noncompliance, they may lose their *Nung* (social dignity) in a tribe (Tobin et al., 2013). Dayan (2021) further elaborates that the chief factors that influence violence against women in Israel are rapid technological development and low economic status. She believed that violence against women is an attempt to seek low-status social compensation. Violent behaviour is a refuge for a low economic status individual to protect their sense of societal standing in the tribal hierarchy. Singh & Bhandari (2021a) describes that economic and revenge motives are mostly attached to the majority of cases of violence in Afghanistan and Pakistan and for the accomplishment of nefarious designs *Faislo* system and *Panchayat* (Tribal arbitration) and *Wadera* (Tribal lord) are the most suitable channels, who effectively negotiate for the life of accused and medium of

compensation. Hussain (2019) explores that the *Faislo* system (Tribal arbitration) is an institution to foster communal clashes and trade women, from parading them naked in front of the crowd to practicing *Sangchatti* to make the opponents weak and ashamed of cultural supremacy. Ahmed (2016) discusses that patriarchy, low-income individuals and sexual appetites are a binding force to collectively license a tribal man to go as wicked as possible. Jaishankar & Halder (2017) elucidate that South Asian rural areas have turned into a terror territory where a woman is responsible for her and her family's honour in terms of modesty and chastity and a man with his masculinity, any slight deviation in culturally described boundaries has a minimum price death to restore the honour of family and tribe. It not only brings financial benefits to the men of his family but also helps them to redeem themselves. Singh & Bhandari (2021b) further illustrate that every country advocates and provides its citizens protection from violation of their rights, and legislation provides a solid foundation for strict accountability for the perpetrators. However, the legal process in case of violation of women's rights is always very difficult to proceed since it is very difficult to provide evidence against the accused as the killings are generally considered a very personal matter related to *Gheratt* (Honor). Apart from the poverty-stricken people of Sindh, who are living below the poverty line, they hardly venture to engage in costly court proceedings for years. The only choice they are left with is to approach their feudal lords (*Wadera*) and grant more legitimacy to *the Panchayat* system (tribal arbitration).

Sarir (2017) mentions that Pakistani society is having its “renaissance” and experiencing conservatism and liberalism at the same time; however dominating part is a strict traditional culture. 63 percent of the population lives in rural suburbs, and strict adherence to its informal justice system is their top priority. With an increase in literacy in urban areas, women have accumulated power and self-dependency; subsequently, their woes are much lighter and less severe in comparison with their counterparts in rural Sindh. Hussain (2006) concludes that the Informal justice system was also coined for the relief of poor people, smooth sailing of societal functioning and harnessing the best from individuals, but due to lower socio-economic vulnerability of women oppressive and humiliating traditions like honour killing, forced marriages and compensation marriages are still a popular practice in Sindh.

Objective of the study

This study examines how economic deprivation drives tribal conflicts and the practice of *Sangchatti* (women's compensatory exchange) in Khairpur, Sindh. It analyzes the intersection of poverty, resource disputes, and gender violence, while documenting survivor experiences to inform policy interventions. The research aims to reframe *Sangchatti* as a structural issue, not just a cultural tradition, by linking economic pressures to systemic women's oppression in tribal communities.

Literature review

The practice of *Sangchatti* (women given as compensation in tribal disputes) persists as a harmful traditional practice in rural Sindh, rooted in complex socioeconomic factors. Anthropological research by Shah (2017) demonstrates how this custom operates within Sindh's tribal feud system (*karo-kari*), where women become commodities to resolve conflicts over land, water and honor. As Memon (2023) argues in their ethnographic study of upper Sindh, economic deprivation creates conditions where impoverished families accept women's exchange as "compensation" to avoid prolonged feuds. Feminist scholars like Zia (2014) critique how patriarchal capitalism transforms women's bodies into currency, with the practice most prevalent in districts like Khairpur and Ghotki, where poverty rates exceed 60% (Baneria, 2012). While

NGOs like Aurat Foundation (2022) report some success with legal empowerment programs, Mukhtar (2024) evaluation suggests economic interventions must accompany legal reforms to disrupt this practice's structural foundations. This literature collectively establishes Sangchatti as a gendered economic violence requiring multidimensional solutions addressing both immediate harm and underlying deprivation. Anthropological studies have traced the historical roots of Sangchatti to pre-colonial tribal justice systems in Sindh. As highlighted by Shaikh (2024), this practice emerged as a traditional conflict resolution mechanism among warring tribes, where women were treated as transferable property rather than autonomous individuals. The persistence of Sangchatti in contemporary times, particularly in districts like Khairpur, Ghotki, and Sukkur, demonstrates the enduring power of tribal justice systems that often override formal legal frameworks. Economic analyses have established a strong correlation between poverty and the prevalence of Sangchatti. Wassan (2021) found that in resource-scarce regions where livelihoods depend on limited agricultural resources, women become a form of currency to settle disputes over land, water rights, and livestock. This economic perspective helps explain why impoverished families might view Sangchatti as a "necessary" solution to avoid costly legal battles or prolonged conflicts.

Feminist scholars have critically examined the gender dimensions of this practice. Zia (2018) and Khatoon (2021) conceptualize Sangchatti as a form of gendered economic violence that systematically reinforces women's subordinate status. Their research demonstrates how the practice denies women agency over their bodies and futures while perpetuating intergenerational poverty by removing women from education and formal employment opportunities. The legal landscape surrounding Sangchatti presents a paradox. While Pakistan's legal system technically prohibits the practice through multiple laws, including the Anti-Honour Killing Laws (2016) and Sindh Criminal Law Amendment (2019), implementation remains weak in rural areas (Bhatt, 2022). Legal scholars identify several barriers to effective enforcement, including collusion between tribal leaders and local law enforcement, victims' families fearing economic repercussions, and the absence of witness protection mechanisms.

Methodology

This study was conducted in rural Khairpur, Sindh, where economic factors significantly shape local behaviour while the culturally embedded practice of Sangchatti (women as compensation) persists as a dominant mechanism for resolving blood feuds, property disputes, family conflicts, and honour-related matters. Employing Sekaran's (1983) methodology, we selected a sample of 85 participants for quantitative analysis and 7 key informants for qualitative interviews, comprising women subjected to compensatory practices, their family members, and affected relatives. Following Kumar's (2013) approach for variable indexing, we conducted reliability analysis (Smith, 2000), which yielded a coefficient of 7 for behavioural assessment, while controlling for demographic, educational, familial, and socioeconomic factors. Using SPSS 25.0, we performed comprehensive statistical analyses, including frequency/percentage distributions and regression analysis, establishing relationships between variables at a 0.5 significance level. This rigorous mixed-methods approach enabled a systematic examination of how economic pressures interact with cultural traditions to sustain Sangchatti practices in contemporary rural Sindh.

Results:

Table 1: Economic importance and women used as compensation

Statement	Response Category	Frequency (Percentage)
Women as compensation (Sangchatti) are demanded on a priority basis in Sindhi culture.	Agree (A)	27 (31.8%)
	Strongly Agree (S.A)	29 (34.1%)
	Neutral (N)	9 (10.6%)
	Disagree (D)	3 (3.5%)
	Strongly Disagree (S.D)	17 (20.0%)
You readily give other valuables (piece of land, livestock, and money) for dispute settlement instead of women as compensation (Sangchatti).	Agree (A)	32 (37.6%)
	Strongly Agree (S.A)	22 (25.9%)
	Neutral (N)	2 (2.4%)
	Disagree (D)	18 (21.2%)
	Strongly Disagree (S.D)	11 (12.9%)
You give a woman in compensation (Sangchatti) since you do not have other valuables to surrender for dispute settlement.	Agree (A)	21 (24.7%)
	Strongly Agree (S.A)	7 (8.2%)
	Neutral (N)	10 (11.8%)
	Disagree (D)	8 (9.4%)
	Strongly Disagree (S.D)	39 (45.9%)
Waderas (chieftain) and Faislo system (tribal arbitration) force you to surrender your women in compensation (Sangchatti) instead of valuables.	Agree (A)	18 (21.2%)
	Strongly Agree (S.A)	15 (17.6%)
	Neutral (N)	18 (21.2%)
	Disagree (D)	15 (17.6%)
	Strongly Disagree (S.D)	19 (22.4%)
Rival tribe priorities your women to be paid as compensation (Sangchatti) instead of cash or a piece of land?	Agree (A)	30 (35.3%)
	Strongly Agree (S.A)	24 (28.2%)
	Neutral (N)	3 (3.5%)
	Disagree (D)	18 (21.2%)
	Strongly Disagree (S.D)	10 (11.8%)

To get rid of an extra feeding mouth and liability, you prefer women as compensation (Sangchatti).	Agree (A)	6 (7.1%)
	Strongly Agree (S.A)	16 (18.8%)
	Neutral (N)	6 (7.1%)
	Disagree (D)	34 (40.0%)
	Strongly Disagree (S.D)	23 (27.1%)
You prioritize the practice of women as compensation (Sangchatti) because land, livestock and money are very difficult to regain.	Agree (A)	2 (2.4%)
	Strongly Agree (S.A)	31 (36.5%)
	Neutral (N)	7 (8.2%)
	Disagree (D)	6 (7.1%)
	Strongly Disagree (S.D)	39 (45.9%)

Table .2: Reliability of Economic Importance

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.849	7

The scale's **Cronbach's alpha** ($\alpha = 0.849$) indicates **good internal consistency**, as it exceeds the threshold of 0.7 (Nunnally, 1978). This reliability assessment is based on a **7-item variable** measuring attitudes toward *Sangchatti* (women as compensation) in Sindhi culture.

Table 3: Model Summary (Regression Analysis)

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of Estimate	Cronbach's α
1	.892	.796	.782	0.425	0.849

Table 3: ANOVA Table

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	24.732	1	24.732	58.417	.000
Residual	6.348	83	0.423		
Total	31.080	84			

Table 4: Coefficients

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	Sig.	95% CI
Constant	1.247	0.182	-	6.842	.000	[0.889, 1.605]
Scale Items	0.683	0.089	.892	7.643	.000	[0.506, 0.860]

The analysis reveals a statistically significant relationship between the economic factors and acceptance of Sangchatti (women as compensation). The strong positive regression coefficient ($B = 0.683$, $\beta = .892$, $p < .001$) suggests that economic considerations (as measured by the 7-item scale) substantially influence cultural acceptance of this practice. The scale explains 89.2% of the variance in acceptance scores, indicating that economic factors - including land ownership, livestock, and financial compensation alternatives - are critically tied to the persistence of this tradition. These findings imply that economic interventions (e.g., alternative dispute resolution

methods involving material compensation rather than women) could potentially reduce reliance on this practice by addressing its underlying economic drivers.

Discussion

The findings reveal strong cultural adherence to *Sangchatti*, with 65.9% of respondents (combining Agree/Strongly Agree) acknowledging women are prioritized as compensation. Economic motivations appear influential, as 63.5% prefer surrendering valuables (land, livestock) over women, yet 32.9% admit women are given when alternatives are unavailable. Notably, 38.8% (Q4) report coercion by tribal arbitration systems (*Waderas/Faislo*), while 63.5% observe rival tribes demanding women for material compensation. Paradoxically, only 25.9% link the practice to reducing economic burdens, suggesting cultural norms may outweigh purely utilitarian rationales.

The data indicate *Sangchatti* remains deeply embedded in Sindhi culture, with most participants recognizing its role in dispute resolution. Economic factors emerge as significant but not exclusive drivers, as many concede to the practice when material alternatives are lacking or under pressure from tribal authorities. While rival groups reportedly prioritize female compensation, respondents reject the notion that *Sangchatti* primarily serves to alleviate economic liabilities. This implies the practice persists through a complex interplay of cultural tradition, economic constraints, and systemic coercion, rather than singular motivations. The regression results further confirm that economic variables powerfully predict acceptance, underscoring the need for multifaceted interventions addressing both material and normative dimensions.

Conclusion

The study demonstrates that the practice of *Sangchatti* (women given as compensation) remains deeply rooted in Sindhi culture, driven by a complex interplay of economic necessity, tribal arbitration systems, and traditional norms. While economic factors significantly influence acceptance, with many respondents acknowledging the role of land, livestock, and financial constraints, cultural enforcement through *Waderas* and the *Faislo* system also plays a critical role. Notably, rival tribes' preference for women over material compensation further perpetuates this practice, despite some resistance from individuals who reject its economic justification.

The strong predictive relationship between economic variables and acceptance of *Sangchatti* suggests that interventions aimed at providing alternative dispute resolution mechanisms such as monetary compensation or land settlements, could help reduce reliance on this harmful tradition. However, since cultural enforcement remains a powerful factor, any effective strategy must also address systemic coercion and shift social norms through awareness and legal reforms. Future research should explore community perspectives on alternative solutions to ensure sustainable change while respecting cultural contexts. Ultimately, eradicating *Sangchatti* requires a holistic approach that combines economic empowerment, legal accountability, and community engagement to dismantle the structural and cultural foundations that sustain this practice.

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