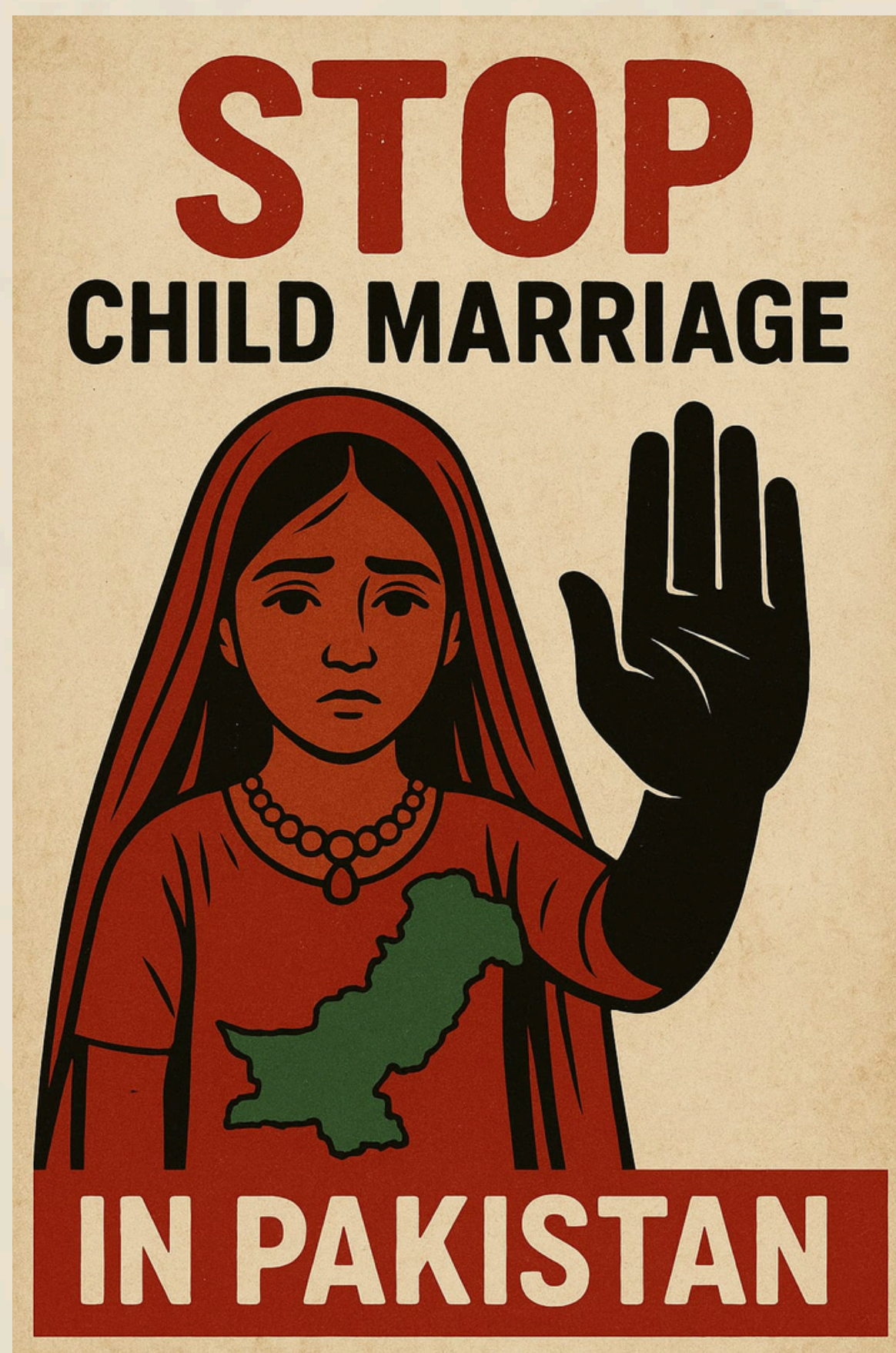


# THE REDRESS REVIEW



This week's issue highlights the historic passage of the Child Marriage Restraint Bill — a vital step toward ending child abuse and gender-based violence. We also pay tribute to the late Syed Sharifuddin Pirzada, a pivotal figure in Pakistan's legal history.

The Redress Review, is a weekly publication where I, Sana Pirzada, will delve into the most pressing issues of the week. Each article will begin by highlighting a grievance and will conclude with thoughtful proposals for change and pathways to justice. The Redress Review is part of the larger initiative known as VLA — Virtual Legal Advisory.



## THE CRUELTY OF SILENCE: CHILD MARRIAGE AND THE HOPE FOR REFORM IN PAKISTAN

Pakistan, a nation teeming with resilience and potential, is too often overshadowed by persistent social injustices—particularly those endured by the poor, by women, and by children. The entrenched inequality that afflicts our society is not simply economic; it is cultural, historical, and systemic. In remote tribal areas, rural heartlands, and impoverished urban settlements, voices go unheard—drowned beneath the weight of poverty, patriarchy, and powerlessness. Among the gravest of these injustices is the enduring evil of child marriage, a practice that continues to strip young girls of their innocence, education, and future.

## A Tribute: In Loving Memory of Syed Sharifuddin Pirzada (1923 - 2017)



On the 2nd of June 2017, I lost my beloved father—Syed Sharifuddin Pirzada—and Pakistan lost one of its most distinguished legal minds. His passing marked the end of an era, but his memory, legacy, and integrity live on. He was not only a national figure of constitutional importance but a deeply devoted father who never said no to anything I asked, and whose warmth and grace remain etched in my heart.

Even into his 90s, my father continued to attend court, his passion for the law undimmed by age.

In countless communities, child brides are "given away" or, more accurately, bartered in desperate transactions driven by poverty and the illusion of protection. Many of these unions are not marriages in any meaningful sense—they are contracts of submission, often binding girls to men twice or three times their age. In a culture where female chastity is linked to family honour and daughters are perceived as financial burdens, marriage is seen as a form of security—an escape from economic uncertainty or social stigma. But the true cost is borne by the girls themselves, whose childhoods are extinguished beneath the burdens of forced intimacy, domestic labour, and, all too often, early pregnancy.

Senator Sherry Rehman has rightly highlighted the terrifying reality: Pakistan's child and maternal mortality rates are among the highest in South Asia. According to UNICEF, nearly 21% of Pakistani girls are married before the age of 18, and over 4% before they turn 15. The consequences are devastating. Underage pregnancies lead to severe health complications, including obstructed labour, obstetric fistula, and even death. These young girls are neither physically nor emotionally equipped for motherhood, yet they are thrust into it without agency or choice.

The recent passing of the Child Marriage Restraint Bill 2025 in the Senate, therefore, is a landmark development. The bill seeks to raise the minimum age of marriage for girls to 18 years—a long-overdue amendment to archaic laws that failed to protect children from this form of exploitation. Predictably, the bill has faced resistance. The Council of Islamic Ideology has opposed it, and it has already been challenged in the Federal Shariat Court by a private citizen, invoking concerns about its compatibility with Islamic injunctions. Yet, it is essential to understand that numerous Islamic countries—including Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia—have already enacted similar protections, guided by the principle of *maslahah* (public interest) and the evolving understanding of rights within Islamic jurisprudence.

Despite the challenges in enforcement—and they are significant—the existence of such a law is not a futile gesture. In Pakistan, where legal implementation often falters, the presence of a statute still matters. Laws shape discourse. They set boundaries. They offer, at the very least, a shield. Consider the Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act and the establishment of FOSPAH (the Federal Ombudsperson for Protection Against Harassment). While workplace harassment remains a pressing issue and stigma continues to silence many, the law has empowered countless women to speak up, and FOSPAH has delivered precedent-setting decisions in favour of complainants. The mere fact that women now know such a recourse exists is a seismic shift.

He visited the Sindh High Court just days before his passing, still offering counsel, still driven by his lifelong belief in justice and duty. He was a man who gave his life to the service of Pakistan, and to the rule of law. Born on June 12, 1923, in Burhanpur, British India, Syed Sharifuddin Pirzada was a descendant of Shaikh Burhanuddin Raz-e-Ilahi of the Shattar order. He completed his education at the University of Bombay in 1945 and was called to the Bar at Lincoln's Inn, London. His early career placed him in the inner circles of history: from 1941 to 1944, he served as Honorary Secretary to Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, and as Secretary of the Bombay City Muslim League (1945-1947). He played an active role in the Pakistan Movement, including leading the publicity campaign for the Bombay Muslim League during the pivotal 1946 general elections and serving as Managing Editor of the Morning Herald, an English daily published from Bombay in 1947.

We must hope that the Child Marriage Restraint Bill 2025 follows a similar trajectory. Its passage signals a shift in narrative—a recognition that the state has a duty to protect its children, especially girls, from institutionalised harm. But real change will require more than legislation. It demands coordinated efforts in education, awareness, community outreach, and above all, the political will to challenge cultural norms that perpetuate this cycle of suffering.

Childhood is not a luxury; it is a right. Girls deserve to attend school, to play, to dream, and to mature free from the trauma of premature adulthood. They are not commodities to be traded under the guise of honour or protection. The true measure of a nation lies in how it treats its most vulnerable. Let us not fail them yet again.

## LITERARY REFLECTIONS: MILTON'S SATAN IN PARADISE LOST

In *Paradise Lost*, John Milton crafts a complex and provocative portrayal of Satan—not merely as a symbol of evil, but as a tragic, almost heroic figure consumed by pride, ambition, and defiance. Through Satan's infamous declaration, "Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven," Milton explores the dangerous allure of self-determination and the human desire for autonomy, even at great cost. Far from a cartoon villain, Satan embodies the inner conflict between reason and rebellion, illuminating the darker recesses of the human soul.

Milton's epic poem ultimately examines themes of free will, obedience, and the consequences of moral choice. By presenting Satan as rhetorically powerful and psychologically layered, Milton challenges readers to consider the nature of evil—not as something distant or monstrous, but as something disturbingly familiar. In doing so, *Paradise Lost* remains a timeless meditation on the struggle between divine order and individual will.

For all his titles, honours, and influence, I remember him most as my father. Quiet, kind, endlessly encouraging—he was a source of calm and strength. He believed in giving, listening, and guiding without ever being overbearing. His humility and his decency made the greatness of his public achievements all the more remarkable.

It is difficult to condense the life of a man like Syed Sharifuddin Pirzada into words. His contributions to Pakistan's legal and diplomatic frameworks are woven into the very fabric of the country's post-independence journey. But to me, and to all who knew him personally, his legacy is also one of integrity, intellect, and unconditional love.

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