



RESEARCH PAPER

Women's Political Participation in Pakistan: A Case Study of Ex-FATA

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ABSTRACT

Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) has been an area of interest for researchers and non-governmental organisations for a very long time, mainly for its extremist, oppressive, and patriarchal practices. Following the 9/11 attacks, the military launched operations against Al Qaeda and Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan terrorists in the area, making FATA a crucial front in the fight against terrorism. Similarly, patriarchy and strict tribal customs in FATA have served as a major impediment to tribal women's involvement in the political realm. The aim of the paper is to investigate the participation of tribal women in the politics of FATA. It specifies multiple barriers that women face in Pakistan's political realm and how a male-dominated society plays a role in discouraging their political participation. It also brings attention to those females challenging the male-established status quo. The argument of the paper is based on available literature and uses secondary sources like academic research articles, reports, and newspaper articles to form an analysis. The findings of the paper are based on the analysis of the data provided by the Election Commission of Pakistan and the Free and Fair Election Network. Women's political participation in Pakistan remains low in general as there is a stark difference between male and female voter turnout. This difference is more prominent in areas of ex-FATA in particular, where patriarchy has a stronghold. Despite strict customs, there have been a few tribal women who attempted to challenge the status quo. There is a need for the state to enact strong regulations which empower women and a need for support from tribesmen to encourage women's engagement in political activities.

KEYWORDS FATA, Gender Disparity, Patriarchy, Women's Political Participation

Introduction

Patriarchy and misogyny are global concepts that are present in the structure of most societies around the world. Lerner defines patriarchy as the expression and institutionalization of men's superiority over women and children in the family and the extension of this over females in society (Lerner, 1986). Pakistan is one country where patriarchy persists. Pakistan's society is deeply ingrained with patriarchal beliefs, which dictate how females are perceived and treated. Gender discrimination, structurally repressive norms of conduct, and the belief which relates women's dignity and family's honour are all ways patriarchy maintains authority over females (Hadi, 2017). According to the Gender Inequality Index (GII) 2021, Pakistan ranked 135 in the world which indicates the presence of a large gender gap. However, as per the recent Global Gender Gap Report (2023), which examines the gender gap in various domains such as economic opportunities and engagement, receiving education, political autonomy, and health, the global ranking of Pakistan has drastically decreased to 142 out of 146 states.

FATA is specifically known to be the bedrock of patriarchal and oppressive practices. The gender disparity in FATA is more evident where women are deprived of their fundamental human rights due to strict cultural traditions which have been

embedded in society since the dawn of the century. The immoral and damaging customs that seek to maintain the subservient position of females are justified and legitimised as cultural norms, often with religious connotations (Hadi, 2017). Strict gender roles in FATA also inhibit women's prospects for academic and professional advancement along with personal growth (Ahmed, 2018). From early childhood, females are taught to be subservient to males. The social structure of tribal societies is such that it forces women to conform to patriarchal norms (Khan et al., 2023). Therefore, tribal traditions and customs also act as a major impediment for female candidates who wish to participate in elections and conduct their political campaigns.

The Federally Administered Tribal Areas and the Status of Women

FATA is one of Pakistan's most politically, socially, and economically backward regions. In May 2018 it was renamed as Khyber District after being merged with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. According to the national census 2017, the estimated total population of the region is 5 million (PBS 2017). FATA is mainly a mountainous region which makes it unfavourable for large-scale agriculture or industrial production. The region experiences severe poverty and most of the population resides in rural areas with lower employment opportunities. According to the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) estimates, FATA has the highest poverty rate in Pakistan and 71.5% of its population lives below the poverty line (OPHI 2022).

Women in tribal areas have an inferior position due to misogynistic societal traditions. For years, females of FATA have been unnoticed, powerless, and without a voice. The female population in the area is also based on estimates because they cannot be properly counted. Women experience a great amount of injustice due to the strongly embedded tribal customs. Qadeer (2014) notes that FATA is a male-dominated region where females are entirely dependent upon the male members of the family for political, economic, and social well-being.

The Pashtun society in general and tribal region, in particular, is strongly influenced by Islam but more by Pashtunwali. Pashtunwali is a Pashtun code of conduct that has significantly affected women's status in Pashtun society and does not favour women's welfare. It has set specific gender roles for men and women but violation of these is too risky specifically for women (Khan et al. 2016). Pashtunwali has a set of principles which has also given respect and honour to women as mothers, daughters, sisters, and wives (Naseer 2022). However, it has taken away the fundamental rights that Islam has provided women with and has rather set up principles that serve the interest of men.

Practices under the Pashtunwali such as being killed in the name of honour deny women their right to life. Ghairat (honour) is one of the major principles of Pashtunwali which allows the killing of women. The honour of the family or a man is entirely dependent upon women, so a threat to their honour can simply result in the killing of women. The case of Hina Shahnawaz serves as one example of honour killing. She was a 27-year-old tribal woman who was educated and worked for a non-governmental organisation in Islamabad. Her cousin shot her when she did not accept his marriage proposal as according to the tribal customs, Shahnawaz was a disgrace to the honour of his clan (Sethna, 2017). Thus, the achievement of socio-economic freedom by tribal women like Shahnawaz is usually equivalent to death.

A young female from Kurram Agency who was exchanged through a Jirga to resolve a dispute stated that under tribal customs, females receive worse treatment than

dogs (Sethna 2017). Similarly, women are denied their right to inherit property and are not given property before marriage nor after marriage. Hence, this does not give them the chance to have some form of economic independence or financial security and deprives them of their economic rights.

According to the survey conducted by an activist from Kurram Agency, Noreen Naseer on views of women on tribal customs, most of the older women had accepted their unpleasant fate whereas, younger females criticized the harsh customs endorsed by the Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR). Naseer highlighted that even in the current modern era, the Pashtun man is of the view that his cultural practices are predominant and the tribal society is equitable (Sethna, 2017). As Pakistan is a male-dominated society, men have control over politics, economy, and culture and the structure strengthens the male hold over these domains. In tribal areas, the control of men over these domains is greater and the region experiences high gender disparity, as a result, it is not easy to challenge their status quo.

Furthermore, the merging of FATA with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa did set up a judicial system, however, it cannot be accessed by tribal women (Naseer, 2022). Tribal women have been given some representation in the National Assembly of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa through quota but still are unable to present a bill for women in their constituency (Naseer, 2022). Therefore, for the political, social, and economic advancement of women, there needs to be a strong advocate who encourages women to gain education and seek employment as it is their fundamental right.

Importance of Women's Political Participation

Women's participation in politics refers to women's rights and liberty to pursue their interests, cast votes, and participate in elections (Begum, 2023). Women's political participation is not limited to casting votes in elections but also entails becoming political advocates and activists, gaining membership in political parties, and even running as a candidate (UN, 2005). Freedom of expression, liberty to gather and associate, involvement in public matters, the ability to become a candidate, run for office, and be successful in elections are the foundations of political participation (UN, 2005). According to global norms, males and females both enjoy this basic right to completely engage in the electoral and political process. However, in actuality, females usually find it more challenging to put this right into effect (UN, 2005).

Most importantly, the involvement of women in the political realm appears to be a significant step towards promoting female empowerment. Therefore, the ability and independence of women to use their right to make decisions, cast votes, participate as candidates in the electoral process, and take part in political protests serve as necessary components of their political empowerment (Adamu, 2023). It is believed that greater representation of women in politics could result in an increased focus on challenges experienced by women within the state. Women's involvement in politics is regarded as a vital precondition for both, gender equality and basic democracy (Funk and Mueller, 2018). Begum (2023) accentuates that female political participation guarantees greater accountability to females and promotes their involvement in decision-making at a public level. Therefore, it is believed that one significant measure of societal gender parity is the degree of women's engagement in politics and the opportunity to have a say in the decision-making process (Begum, 2023).

According to the UN (2005), in order for democratic elections to be conducted in a fair and just manner, it is imperative that women are provided with the opportunity to participate fully and equally in elections. The deprivation of this right, as a result, does

not adhere to international norms and obligations. Moreover, one of the most significant institutions influencing females' involvement in politics, is political parties (UN, 2005). As in the majority of states, it is the political party which decides the nomination of individuals. Therefore, a crucial factor influencing females' chances of political empowerment, is their role in political parties.

Similarly, along with political inclusion, in order to ensure the inclusion of women in the economy and achieve sustainable development, it is crucial to empower females (Khalid et al., 2020). Kutty (2003) asserts that empowering females entails raising their level of understanding and enabling them to become economically productive, politically aware and active, and autonomous so they are able to make wise decisions.

Awan (2016) claims successful female engagement requires gradual socio-cultural transformation, which should be addressed with a bottom-up approach supported by social and economic spheres. Only that is believed to enable females to attain dominant and progressive positions within the political realm. In addition, it is suggested that there is a need to strengthen the role played by females in the political system in order to achieve successful female political involvement and empowerment. To achieve these, Awan (2016) also stresses the need for a shift in normative behaviours at the local level and in societal institutions.

Women's Political Involvement in Pakistan

In the modern world, the majority of countries have provided women with two fundamental rights, the freedom to vote and contest elections. Constitutional and legal measures have been introduced worldwide in order to boost women's participation in politics and electoral processes (Sharif and Hina, 2018). Despite the extensive and constant feminist efforts for representative equality, gender inequality in political representation still exists (Celis and Lovenduski, 2018). Representative institutions are still male-dominated despite continuous efforts for equality (Childs and Lovenduski, 2013).

Democracies around the globe have made an effort to guarantee equal participation of females. Despite the success rate not being constant, Pakistan seems to be moving backwards instead of forward. In Pakistan during the first general elections of 1970, there were 77.8 women voters compared with 100 men whereas, in the 2013 elections the ratio of women had lowered down to 77.4 (Mehdi, 2015). Free and Fair Election Network, an organisation situated in Islamabad that observes elections, highlighted that in the general elections of 2013, females were restrained from casting votes at 564 out of 64, 176 country's polling stations (Ebrahim, 2013).

According to the government's data, the registered male voters in Pakistan are over 48 million and over 37 million registered voters are female (Ebrahim, 2013). In Pakistan, there are approximately 106 million registered voters and only 44 percent of those are females. Women who are eligible to vote are not registered as citizens in Nadra in the first place nor on the electoral rolls (Javed, 2021). Similarly, the disparity in voter turnout between males (51.77%) and females (32.96%) in KP including FATA was the largest of any province, with 2.77 million fewer women than men casting ballots in the area (FAFEN Report, 2018). Looking at FATA specifically, there were 40.03% male votes and 23.8% female votes (Government of Pakistan, 2018). The percentage of women votes was less than 10% in the tribal area, North Waziristan. (FAFEN Report, 2018).

Moreover, according to Javed's survey data, 30.4 percent of men were of the view that women giving their opinions about politics was inappropriate and 64 percent were

of the view that women becoming political party workers was inappropriate. The turnout of women in the 2018 general elections in these households was 7 percent lower (Javed 2021). The chairperson of the Balochistan Commission on Status of Women, Fauzia Shaheen claimed that whenever women of Pakistan had the opportunity to prove their ability, they did so. She stated that Pakistani females have played a role in all national institutions such as assemblies, cabinets, and the Senate (Shahid, 2023). She is of the view that Pakistan will not be able to prosper if there is no female participation.

Furthermore, as per the recent voter analysis by FAFEN on general elections 2024, the female voter turnout was 30.9%, whereas the male voter turnout was 46.6% in KPK. A decrease can be observed in the overall turnout of both males and females in comparison to the data of 2018. Specifically, female voter turnout in the KPK region in 2024 has experienced a decline of 2.06% in contrast to the turnout of the 2018 general elections (FAFEN 2018; FAFEN 2024). FAFEN underlines that the overall female voter turnout in the country, however, had improved in 2024 as no district experienced a voter turnout below 10%, hence, a notable improvement from 2018. Arguably, the report also then highlighted the existence of gender disparity in voting, as 51.6% of males had cast their votes in comparison to 42.6% of female voters, according to the gender-disaggregated data of polled votes (FAFEN, 2024).

Exploring Tribal Women's Participation in Politics and Their Perspectives

The first tribal female, Badam Zari from Bajaur Agency came forth to run for a seat in the National Assembly. Her goal was to be a voice for tribal women. Earlier in 2013, she stated that she had decided to take part in the elections after consulting various women and even male elders from the region who agreed to provide their complete support along with financial help. She highlighted that half of the tribal area's population consisted of females, however, they have always been denied their fundamental rights (Khan, 2013). Zari was an ordinary housewife in her forties who used to walk a long way for the collection of firewood and to fetch water. It saddened her to see that women in the village had to continue this challenging task daily. Thus, in an interview with Dawn, she stated that she aims to make an effort in the provision of clean drinking water and health facilities for women if she is elected (Ebrahim 2013).

Zari's main priority was to provide tribal women with basic civic facilities and safeguard female rights. She was also aware of the fact that the initiative she had taken for the sake of tribal women was quite risky but she wanted to give them coverage and wanted her decision to leave a positive effect on tribal women. She further claimed that she aims to strive to convince women to cast a vote by stepping outside their homes, first. Similarly, her wish was to portray a positive image of tribal areas as their reputation has been ruined by militancy and terrorist activities, mainly of the Bajaur Agency (Khan, 2013).

Once Zari's nomination papers were accepted by the Election Commission of Pakistan, she began her election campaign from Arang Utmankhel, her hometown (Dawn News, 2013). Although tribal areas are known to be conservative and strongly against women's participation in the public realm, her people had promised to provide her with their full support in the elections. Her husband Mohammad Sultan, unlike other tribal men, was happy about her decision to join politics and quite proud of her for taking this major step. He also said that Zari will have his support despite setbacks (Ebrahim, 2013). A large number of her relatives which included her sister and her father accompanied her in her election campaign. A lot of women from her area and different villages also came to her support. The people from her region were of the opinion that

Zari's decision was an honour for the people in that area. A 60-year-old man from the region, Lal Khan stated that he hoped for her to win the election and for her success, the people of her region were ready to make sacrifices (Dawn News, 2013). Therefore, such support from tribal people for women's participation in politics is a ray of hope for women's empowerment in tribal areas.

Similarly, Nausheen Jamal, the project coordinator of the Qabaili Khor Organisation spoke at a news conference and stated that through the merger of FATA with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the provision of basic rights of tribal people would be guaranteed. She highlighted that there was a need for tribal women to be given great opportunities to engage in politics as they are required to and guarantee their participation in the electoral and decision-making process (Dawn News, 2018). She further added that in order to allow tribal women to participate effectively in politics and contribute to the country's economic development, a special financial package should be launched to provide them with the opportunities to do so and economically empower them (Dawn News, 2018.)

The merger of FATA with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa enabled women to participate in politics. Naheed Afridi was the first woman from the region who participated in elections and received a ticket from her political party, Awami National Party on the general seat in PK-106 of Khyber district (The Nation, 2019). In Naheed Afridi's constituency, the registered female voters were 65,000 and about 8000 women cast their votes (UN Women, 2020). However, although a large-scale election campaign was carried out with great media coverage, Naheed Afridi had only received 194 votes whereas, in total 12 thousand votes were secured by her male opponent (Tribal News Network, 2019).

Naheed Afridi believes in women's empowerment and her goal is to fight for it till the end. She pointed out that although she was aware of the challenges that came along with her contesting elections from a conservative region, she wanted to be the voice of those who did not have a voice and become a women's role model (The Nation, 2019). She states that the only way for her to become a voice for the voiceless was through contesting elections. Afridi highly encourages women to stand up and make an effort for their rights because she believes no one else would do so for them (The Nation, 2019). Moreover, whenever Afridi met women voters, she felt satisfied because they were comfortable discussing their resentments with her (Shinwari, 2019). She also pointed out that although male contestants had won elections with the assistance of female voters, they never tried to solve the problems experienced by females in the health, education, and employment sectors and the shortage of clean water (Shinwari, 2019).

Afridi faced multiple challenges while carrying out her door-to-door campaign, especially from her opponents who used her campaign picture to start propaganda against her. Her objective was not merely to join the assembly rather she wished to be a glimmer of hope and inspiration for the ignored women of the region (Ibid). Her campaign faced much sexist resistance from the get-go; instances such as being prevented from visiting a girls' seminary in Jamrud or facing backlash from tribal elders over a group photo at the Bab-i-Khyber are the two examples (Shinwari 2019).

Furthermore, Afridi highlighted that activism is not an easy job for females in Pakistan in general and in tribal districts in particular. The reason for this is that women activists receive death threats and are bullied on social media in the form of character assassination. However, Afridi had not lost hope as she believed that contesting elections

and carrying out an election campaign was her constitutional right. She tried to reach out to female voters who were neglected on purpose in previous elections, mainly held for the National Assembly (Shinwari, 2019).

Tribal women have not given up on their right to contest elections. For the elections in 2024, Shakira Shinwari, Lal Zaida, and Naseem Riaz, along with 76 male candidates, submitted their candidature papers for three provincial assembly seats in Landi Kotal, Jamrud, and Bara (Shinwari, 2024). Shakira Shinawari, while regarding male representatives as unsuccessful in creating a significant difference in the lives of tribal women, viewed herself as a suitable candidate to advocate for the rights of underprivileged tribal females. Similarly, in an interview with Dawn, she expressed the necessity for specific regulations for empowering women as they lag behind men. Thus, both expressed their motivation to bring improvements by performing their part.

Male Perspective on Tribal Women's Participation in Politics

It is a common belief among male tribesmen that women do not belong in the political and economic realm. Ibrahim Shinwari (2024) called attention to the strict commitment of tribal elders to tribal customs. He highlighted that females' involvement in the election of 2024, was regarded as a challenge to tribal elder's authority. An elder from Zakhakhel, Malak Abdur Razzaq was of the opinion that women running for office and revolting against the status quo established by men, were prohibited under tribal customs. He then also highlighted that the present scenario has evolved, with women undermining the authority of elders and making their independent decisions (Shinwari, 2024).

On the other hand, a young male social activist, Turab Ali, expressed a distinct point of view. He emphasised the right of women in tribal areas to have equal parliamentary representation, given that they accounted for half of the population in the region. He also stated that challenges experienced by local females remained unaddressed due to the lack of representation in the assemblies, as male legislators were the least concerned

Similarly, in 2013, a male activist, Ibrash Pasha, working with Khwenda Kor, a non-governmental organization was positive about tribal women's steps to engage in politics. He stated that the attack on Malala did not prevent people from sending their daughters to school to receive education, so these women will also destroy the impediments that come their way as a change has to come. He was hopeful that such a positive change would eventually happen even if it took a long time (Ebrahim 2013).

Impediments Women Experience in Politics

Women experience multiple hindrances while trying to enter the political realm. Women's participation in politics is affected by several factors such as gender discrimination, dependency on men and influence of their decisions, restricted mobility, societal disapproval, and lack of education and awareness (UN Women 2020). Moreover, the absence of polling stations for women and transportation, unsafe environment for women, lack of women's interest in participating in politics, and poor treatment of women in political parties further prevent women from joining politics (UN Women, 2020).

Gender discrimination is a prominent factor that has prevented women from joining the political realm. Discrimination against women to join politics is very common

in the developing world and is more prominent in specific regions for example, FATA in this case. Women in such regions continuously experience the violation of their political rights (Khayyam and Tahir 2019). They cannot achieve their dreams of joining politics and doing well for their country because of the deeply embedded patriarchy in the social structure. The main reason behind women's restriction to participate in politics or contest elections is the country's patriarchal social system (Ahmad et al. 2012). Although some women might be capable of contesting elections and participating in the decision-making of the government, they are prevented from engaging in politics. The coordinator of Balochistan pointed out that the major impediment to women's political participation is the inequality in the distribution of social and economic resources. She added that women's problems were being undermined at all decision-making platforms rather than being addressed (Shahid, 2023).

It is important to note however, that Article 25(2) of the Constitution of Pakistan 1973, does not allow discrimination on the basis of sex. The constitution provides all citizens with equality, freedom, and respect, however, these principles remain on paper and there is an absence of its application in Pakistan's political realm. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has also proclaimed that all political parties and candidates shall be provided with equal opportunities to participate in elections (Amjad et al. 2013). According to ECP Para No. 20, Code of Conduct 2013, women's participation in elections should be encouraged by political parties. ECP Para No. 24, Code of Conduct 2013 states that both males and females should be provided with equal opportunities to participate in elections.

However, the interests of females and the problems faced by them are regarded as non-political. Their issues are belittled systemically and even if they are politicised, they are given a special or minority status (Celis and Lovenduski, 2018). Many feminists are unsatisfied with how slow the process of opening up of political agendas for females' interests and problems is and how there is an absence of policies that address the concerns of females (Ibid). Sadia Sohail Rana member of PTI claimed that problems faced by women are not regarded as the main problems of government by men and even educated liberal men had opposed the "Women Protection Bill 2016" in the assembly (Sharif and Hina, 2018).

Politics is a field that has been associated with men but not women. It is believed that the field is not suitable for women at all rather is the worst field a woman could pursue. In Pakistan, it is a common occurrence that women experience character assassination if they join politics. It is a common belief in the society that women's character needs to be guarded by any means (Khayyam and Tahir, 2019). Thus, the situation for women becomes more unfavourable because in the field of politics, the first thing which is criticized by male politicians is women's character (Thanikodi and Sugirtha 2007). Women do not want to be labelled as a woman of bad character just because of being in politics. Robina Jamil, another PTI member pointed out that society believes that if a woman is not inside the four walls of her home, she is doing something wrong (Sharif & Hina, 2018).

Similarly, as women are not usually independent in most regions of Pakistan, their role is limited to their house and if they attempt to join politics, it is viewed as a threat to male masculinity. Men are the breadwinners, so men might not allow women to have a political career and be financially independent because it affects their male ego (Khayyam and Tahir, 2019). As a result of male domination and control in political

parties, women are often ignored and not provided much opportunities by political parties in important party-related decision-making.

Tribal areas remain backward due to the influence of the Taliban who did not allow women to prosper. The Taliban were a threat to women's education and employment and forced them to wear headscarves (Bashir et al. 2021). Conflicts in FATA worsened the life of common people and women were the most affected part of patriarchal society. In tribal areas, the mobility of women is restricted due to conservative culture and poor security. Taliban also played a role in restricting women's mobility by not allowing them to go to schools for learning and working and even doctor visits were not allowed without a male accompanying them. The militants targeted those who were advocates of female education and rights. During the early period of the Taliban invasion, Farida Afridi, the head of an NGO working for women's education and rights was gunned down by the Taliban. (Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, 2014). The high illiteracy, absence of good education, restricted mobility, and less exposure to media are the reasons why most females are not able to choose whom to cast a vote for or understand why voting is important. They either cast a vote on the decision of their males or do not cast a vote in the first place. Women are also unaware of how electoral processes work thus, they are unable to participate in politics (UN Women 2020).

Farzana Butt, an MPA of Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz, blamed Pakistan's social structure for creating hurdles for women in every part of life, specifically in politics. It is believed that only those women could participate in politics who come from a political family background but ordinary women who have no political affiliations are discouraged from taking part in politics and decision-making institutions in Pakistan (Sharif and Hina 2018). According to the research conducted by the UN, a female respondent had said that participation in politics was a great challenge for tribal women. She further added that the only election contest from Khyber, Naheed Afridi was strongly criticized despite being a strong candidate and ended up not receiving good votes (UN Women 2020).

In order to be part of the political realm, one needs to be financially strong and independent. Politics is considered an arena suitable only for men as men do not experience restricted mobility or financial dependence rather they are able to make decisions without any hurdles or assistance. As women are unable to travel on their own or are not allowed to go in public by men, it makes it challenging for them to attend political meetings and election campaigns. Women also experience unpleasant incidents like sexual harassment in public which is also a major obstacle for them and due to such occurrences in political gatherings, not only families are unwilling to allow their women to participate in politics but they themselves hesitate as well. Thus, such an unsafe environment is one of the major barriers for women to participate in political processes.

Shamsa Ali a member of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI) stated that it is not easy for women to manage large-scale projects of government, however, if one's husband also works as a politician, it would be easier to go to the assembly or work in a high position. Sometimes the sons and husbands of women in politics do not agree to accompany them in party meetings or election campaigns because being recognized with the women's reference makes them feel uncomfortable (Sharif and Hina, 2018). On the other hand, some women claim that it is quite challenging for them to manage two major duties at once. The burden is higher when they have to take care of their husband and children and perform household chores while engaging in political activities. In case of failure to satisfy their families, women experience marital abuse because of society's negative

perceptions (Sharif and Hina, 2018). Therefore, their political career and family life, both suffer.

Some men are of the view that women let men choose for them whom to cast a vote for because society has not provided women the freedom and power to make decisions and cast a vote for a person of their own choice. This is also because a majority of women lack knowledge about politics and political candidates in general. Men do not think positively about women's capabilities and play a role in creating impediments to their empowerment. The educated and open-minded men also view women's liberty and independence negatively. They do not wish to see independent and free women as this is what they wish for themselves. Due to male ego, they do not wish or accept a woman to work in a superior position to them. Therefore, males create unfavourable situations for women which makes it challenging for them to step outside and make an effort for the security and well-being of women (Abdullah et al. 2015).

The religious leaders also have a strong influence in rural areas. The interpretation of some verses of the Quran has been done in such a way that does not support the equality and political participation of females (Jamal, 2015). Many women are unaware of the rights their religion, Islam, and the Constitution have provided them with. Politics is one way through which women can stand up for their rights and become a part of the legislation to be given their rights. Sadia Sohail Rana of PTI notes that there is a need for women to join politics to fight for their rights not only for their own good but for the good of society. She adds that only when women know their rights then they can fight against the injustices and inequality in society (Sharif & Hina, 2018).

Conclusion

Patriarchy, oppressive customs, high gender disparity, poverty, female financial dependency, lack of women's knowledge about politics, and lack of implementation of pro-women laws all influence women's participation in politics. Pakistan in general is a patriarchal society but these patriarchal practices are more prominent in the tribal areas in particular. The oppressive and backward nature of FATA acts as an impediment for women to excel socially, economically or politically. The ancient harsh practices are the cause behind women's inferior position in the region. Unfortunately, many women are unaware of the rights provided to them by their religion and their constitution, leaving them unable to take a stand for themselves. The dependence of women on men further lowers the chances of women's political participation. Additionally, women's limited education and lack of knowledge regarding political processes prevent them from becoming a part of decision-making processes. Despite these challenges, there exist women who have dared to challenge the status quo. Women like Badam Zari and Naheed Afridi are role models for tribal women who tried to break free from the chains of patriarchy and oppression and struggle for women's rights in tribal areas. Although it is not easy to change the ongoing traditions, the stories of such ambitious women are a glimmer of hope for women of tribal areas. The example of such women also proves that tribal women's involvement is not completely absent from politics.

Recommendations

There is a strong need for the state to enact strong regulations that encourage and ensure women's education, assist them in seeking employment and becoming financially independent, and most importantly, protect their fundamental rights. There is also a need for the state and non-governmental organisations to raise awareness about the significance of women's engagement in politics. They need to make tribal women realise

their potential and understand how their contribution could overall change the situation for the better. Additionally, the Election Commission of Pakistan could perform a vital role in educating female voters, improving their accessibility to polling stations, and minimising impediments that impede females from exercising their right to vote, particularly in remote tribal areas.

Arguably, not only does the state and its organisation need to evolve, but there is a need for tribesmen to change their traditional mindset, leaving behind the patriarchal practices and adapting to changing times. Tribesmen need to support the women who wish to achieve professional and academic advancements which can enable them to also contribute to their societies. Therefore, such improvements have the potential to empower tribal women and encourage them to engage in political activities, ultimately leading to the overall development of tribal areas.

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