

**Socio-Economic and Political Status of Women in
FATA -The Process of Development and Phenomenon
of Militancy**

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Abstract

The *Pakhtun* tribal areas of Pakistan, officially known as Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), have been under focus of international media and think tanks since the dawn of the present century for multidimensional negative trends emerging from these areas. The foremost reason of criticism regarding FATA has been the region's stateless character, of which the most dreaded terrorist groups around the globe have taken advantage and turned the region into the epicentre of global, national and regional terrorism perpetrated in the name of Islam. The second most important criticism regarding the *Pakhtun* tribal areas is the extreme underdevelopment of the region and their inhabitants and its linkage to the trends of terrorism and extremism in the name of Islam. Different experts have pointed at various causes for these areas becoming the hub of international terrorism and for the extreme underdevelopment of the region. The main causes for the terrorism emanating from FATA and the socioeconomic and political backwardness of the tribal areas, which experts, researchers and analysts have pointed at, include the policy of total indifference of successive Pakistani regimes towards the region; the remote geographical location and inhospitable topography and the location of these areas at the interface of imperial and ideological rivalries between great powers of the yore, the violent and bellicose *Pakhtun* nationalist character and so on. However, hardly any expert has pointed that. Other valid factors are the extensively patriarchal social structure and the marginalized rather subhuman status of the women population of the FATA. These

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factors have impeded the process of development of the society and infrastructure in these areas and ultimately have resulted in disastrous extremism and terrorism -perpetrated in the name of Islam- for the entire country. Due to extremely low social status, women of FATA could not play any mentionable role in the transformation or modernization of the key social institutions like family, education and economy beside others. It has largely been due to the mass ignorance and extremely low literacy rate among the all-powerful male population of FATA and their socialization in the profoundly rigid and reactionary tribal institutions and values due to which they could not understand the critical importance of enhancing the social status of the womenfolk through education and socioeconomic empowerment. This paper explores the social status of the women population of the tribal areas-which is in majority- and their politico-economic and educational conditions. The impact of these conditions on the overall process of development is also analysed, besides the reason for the region becoming the hub of international, national and local terrorism.

The Social Status of Women in FATA

It is indeed always a great sight for an outsider leading to an utter feeling of veneration when passing through allays and streets of villages of Kurram or Orakzai tribal districts¹. Once you come across a female; she, with almost reflex action swiftness, stops and turns her face off and lets you pass and restarts her work. Equally, the same exalted feeling of respect sprouts, when even the most rough and hawk-eyed Afridi in Khyber Agency turns away his sharp gaze as soon as he sees a woman accompanying you even if she is a western lady. This decent behaviour of tribeswomen and men shows as if the former enjoys an elevated social status in the tribal areas. However, the real condition of the tribeswomen reveals a diametrically opposite picture. The worst condition of tribeswomen in FATA is attributed to the region's political, economic, educational, social and legal structures.

The underlying feature of tribal society is fundamentally

patriarchal. The tribeswomen do not have any say in those affairs which regulate rather governing their lives let alone in general matters. Here, over-generalization is not the purpose as there are exceptions as well. In fact, women of families of *Maliks* and well-to-do tribesmen do have an important role in domestic affairs especially in contracting of marriages. However, in a nutshell the tribeswomen lead a life of virtual bondage.² They are implicitly regarded as a property of their men. The customs of *Swara* and *Vulvar* are its best examples.

The much-criticized custom of *Swara* is still a living reality in FATA whereas in the rest of settled *Pakhtun* areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), it has gradually become a rarity. Under the practice of the profoundly-abhorred custom, girls of the killer(s) family, clan or even tribe are given as ‘compensation’ to settle blood feuds. A girl-most often the killer’s sister- is given in ‘marriage’³ to the victim’s family by the aggressor’s tribe or family members. If the killer does not have unmarried sisters or if the *Jirga* decides to give more than one girl to the aggrieved family, the female cousins or even some distant girl relative(s) of the killer are handed over to the victim's family or tribe. Thus, *Swara* is violation of human and women rights as well as provisions of Quran and *Sunnah*. For a moment if it is accepted that *Swara* ensures peace and order among fiercely violent tribesmen, it cannot be warranted as it benefits only the tribesmen while the women are just used as scapegoats for the wrongs that the former committed.

Although tribal *Pakhtun* men take great pride in their valour, *Swara* proves their self -portrayal of bravery as wrong because they hand over their women to their enemies only to save themselves. The custom of *Swara* also exposes the so-called respect of the tribal *Pakhtun* men towards women. The issue of unceasing tribal and family feuds in FATA further proves the tribesmen’s violent behaviour towards women. The inter-tribal violence would have reduced had these men possessed respect and possessiveness for their women’s honour. However, empirically

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the violence in FATA has increased as new forms like militancy in the name of Islam. As large-scale violence continues to occur in the tribal areas, the Sword of Damocles in the form of *Swara* continues to hang on the head of every girl of FATA.

The militancy by different Taliban groups particularly Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in FATA has displaced hundreds of thousands of inhabitants of the region to the various adjoining districts of KPK⁴ as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). These IDPs largely include women, whose dominant majority had never gone out of their homes or interacted with outside males. As IDPs these women have to lose the protection of their homes and environment along with their perceived honour. This situation has been inflicted on the women of the tribal areas by their own male tribesmen and relatives; thus tribesmen violate their own set standards of morality and honour. However, having said this it is important to clarify that the tribesmen of FATA may not be fully responsible for the extremism and terrorism perpetrated in the name of Islam as the state agencies and non-state alien militant and terrorist groups (who found sanctuaries in FATA) are equally responsible for the situation. Nevertheless, the tribesmen are liable as their traditional control of their areas and resistance to the development initiatives and the facilitations for local, national and international extremist and terrorist groups has provided a conducive environment for terrorism. The rogue state functionaries and extremist and terrorist groups find it easy to follow their respective agendas using FATA as the launching pad.

The claims of inhabitants of FATA regarding the viability and functionality of the tribal social structure and the traditions and social institutions therein notwithstanding, the custom of *Vulvar* or *Ser Paisay* (bride money or head money in *Pashto*) also testifies that a female in Pakistan's tribal areas is a mere chattel of his male family members. Under the custom of *Vulvar* the father, brother or uncle of a girl takes money from the bridegroom or his family for tying a nuptial knot, leading to far-reaching socio-psychological consequences for the girl in definite terms, but for the bridegroom also in no uncertain terms. This custom is widely practiced in

FATA and is always defended by male relatives of the girl by arguing that the money is for the girl's *benefit*.

Bride price has been an old *Pakhtun* tribal practice, given cognition in *Turizona_too*. It (*Turizona*) is a document of codified *Rawaj*, customs, of Turi *Pakhtun* tribes, residing in Kurram. *Turizona* refers to male guardian of woman as her *waris/ malik*, owner. It contains a *nurkhnama*, price list, to fix bride prices of women belonging to various tribes, to combat delay in marriages of men (Khan & Afridi, 2010).

Again the practice cannot be justified by the self-proclaimed honourable male members of FATA because in *Pakhtun* culture, men of honour normatively are not expected to think of taking money from the bridegroom even for spending it on marriage of their daughter, sister etc. This may be called normative social hypocrisy of tribal areas society.

The widespread practice of *Vulvar* among *Pakhtun* tribes of FATA corroborates that male members of that society always have at the back of their minds a consideration that women are their movable property and even many among the former do not hesitate to have a price for that property when keeping that *property* is socially unsanctioned⁵ and economically burdensome. The girl which is taken into wedlock by paying handsome amount comparatively has more *value* for her husband and in-laws for obvious reasons. There have been numerous instances in FATA that husbands after getting fed up of their paid wives have divorced them but not before selling them. *Vulvar* always keeps a tribeswoman in a socially inferior position for rest of her life after getting married. Psychologically she is unable to come to terms with the reality that she is a human of any import. Likewise, the bridegroom and his family members, who have paid for the bride, internalize that the girl is an inferior creature rather a commodity they have purchased. Thus a psychological relationship that develops between a normal husband and wife is never there between a tribal husband and his wife and a relationship of virtual master and slave evolves between them. Consequently, no rights

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are conferred upon a tribeswoman either by her father or her husband. She has no right to receive a share in inheritance of both, whereas, obviously she does not have any say in marriage.

Tor is another custom prevalent in the *Pakhtun* tribal areas of Pakistan. *Tor* can be described as a worst example of honour killing due to which innumerable tribeswomen have lost their lives. Literally the term means *black* in Pashto and applies to 'adulterous' women. In tribal areas it has continually happened that a woman has been adjudged to be killed on a slightest suspicion of being involved with a man, not necessarily sexually. The punishment of death may not be specified for actual adultery but even mostly on many instances girls have been killed for having developed and even an implicitly expressed, likeness for a man. In this regard a woman does not have any legal resort and her punishment does not have any legal sanction. "Under FCR, no case of adultery has ever been registered against a woman. The tribesmen consider it against their honour to settle such cases outside the family and four walls of the house" (Khan & Afridi, 2010).

According to observers and experts of tribal areas, on most of the occasions *Tor* has been used to punish one's enemies by falsely associating the females of one's own family or tribe with the men of enemies of tribal rivals as this is considered as one of the instrumental ways for punishing the rival(s) and foreclosing any way of revenge. In other words among the *Pakhtun* tribes of FATA killing of a man or men is socially sanctioned if he/they have been found to have developed relationship with a woman of one's family or tribe and for which revenge cannot be taken, provided the female(s) who is alleged to have been involved is also killed by her male family members. Thus the custom has been exploited on many occasions to punish one's rivals which otherwise can result in heavy reprisals. With the crude justice system rather the arbitration procedures of *Jirgas*,⁶ the man and the woman, who have been alleged of having committed adultery and thus have become *Tor* are mostly executed.

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Tor is widely practiced in the tribal areas. I am a witness myself, to an incidence in South Waziristan, when a sixty years old man killed his aged and disabled wife and his young male rival separately and in quick succession on account of alleged adultery. I do not think that such a relationship could even exist between the two. In fact, the man wanted to get rid of his rival as well as his burdensome wife and he killed the two birds with one stone. Interestingly, all the community knew that such allegation was completely false but they could do nothing as it was the matter of honour and he 'proved' it by killing even his wife.⁷

It is important to note that *Tor* or *black* is removed by making the culprit *Spin* (White) by killing her and her alleged paramour. This is a strange custom as the burden of proof is entirely and absolutely on the person(s), who have been charged of adultery. Keeping in view the total disempowerment of women in FATA, those who face *Tor* neither can defend themselves nor can escape execution. This corroborates the fundamental flaws in the crude arbitration mechanism of *Jirgas* and depicts the mentality and social attitudes of the *Pakhtun* tribal men towards their womenfolk. Thus it is no surprise that a potent voice has never been raised from within the tribal areas against the custom of *Tor*.

The Legal Status of Women in FATA

Like all other tribal affairs the lives of tribeswomen are regulated not through any Islamic or statutory laws but by tribal *Riwaj* (customs and traditions). Under Article 247 of the Constitution's Clause 3: No Act of Parliament is applicable to FATA despite it being a federal territory. Moreover, under Clause 7 of the same article: Neither the Supreme Court nor a High Court has any jurisdiction over the tribal areas.

Consequently, laws passed in recent years such as Muslim Family Law Ordinance and women-friendly laws including the Women Protection Law, which might have provided some relief to

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tribeswomen, are not enforceable in the tribal areas as FATA does not come within their judicial purview. Keeping in view the adverse legal situation of the women of FATA, the National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) called upon the President in January 2012 to extend the scope of women-friendly legislations to the tribal areas by invoking the powers bestowed upon him under Article 247 of the Constitution (Shah, 2012). However, no measure has been taken in this respect by the end of 2012.

The main pillar of tribal judicial structure is the *Jirga*. There is a monopoly of tribal *Maliks* (tribal chieftains) and *Mullahs* (clerics), so the tribeswomen of FATA cannot even defend let alone argue for their rights as *Jirga* proceedings are clearly prejudicial to their rights and interests. Moreover, women cannot be physically part of the *Jirgas* even when the matter is relevant to them (Khan & Afridi, 2010).

The only tool through which the government of Pakistan has control over the FATA is the dreaded Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR). Unfortunately, one may say, instead of giving any reprieve and relief to tribeswomen, it at best, under Territorial Responsibility clause of 40 FCR, made them liable and punishable for the crimes or criminal charges of their co-tribesmen. Under the territorial responsibility clause the whole tribe including all the male and females and even children of a particular tribal territory were held responsible for a crime committed in their area. Tens of tribeswomen remained imprisoned in different jails of the country for the crimes of their male relatives or members of their tribes.

It was only in 2011 that the President of Pakistan, who is constitutionally empowered to introduce changes to the legal framework governing the tribal areas, announced changes to some draconian clauses including the 40 FCR. Under the reforms now women, children and old men of a tribe cannot be held responsible for the crimes committed by male members of their tribe or family. This is an important development and may give some relief to the women of tribal areas. However, as far as alleviating

their social status is concerned, this simply cannot be done through such measure as it would require a full range of economic, political, social and legal changes in the tribal areas but the state has been insensitive in this regard.

The National Commission on the Status of Women Ordinance 2000, the law under which the commission was set up in July 2000, has yet to be extended to FATA (Shah, 2012). Moreover, the legal reforms and laws which have been made in Pakistan regarding women rights since the turn of the century have not been enforced by the State.⁸ For instance, the Prevention of anti-Women Practices (Criminal Law Amendment) Act, 2011, having provisions to punish anyone depriving women of their share of hereditary property, imposing forced marriage on her, and arranging marriage of a woman with Quran and the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act (Acid Control and Acid Crime Act) 2011, aiming at punishing anyone causing injury to someone by throwing acid or similar agent particularly women, have not been extended to FATA (Shah, 2012).

In a nutshell women in FATA do not have any legal protection or right of inheritance. This is summarized by one female researcher from FATA in the following words:

In tribal culture, a woman has no identity, except with a man. Pukhtunwali does not allow a woman to own land independently or be known by the people on her own. Women are denied the right to inheritance, irrespective of the fact that Islam and Pakistani law recognize this right (Afridi, 2010).

The Role of Women in Politics in FATA

Women traditionally had no role in politics or political arena that existed in FATA. It was only in 1996 that the then President of Pakistan, Farooq Ahmed Khan Leghari, introduced electoral reforms in FATA and gave right of universal suffrage to the inhabitants of the region. As a by-product women in the tribal areas also got the right to vote. In the 1997 general elections

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women voted in significant number in FATA but it was done under the tutelage of their male family members mainly to defeat the rival tribes' candidates (Tierney, 2000).

Very few women have voted ever since in different national elections for the National Assembly candidates from the tribal areas. Rather, on most occasions in most of the tribal districts, candidates and community under the domineering influence of the local clerics entered into pre-electoral agreement not to allow women to vote at all (Talbot, 1988: 2-3). Importantly, a woman from FATA has never been elected as a member of the National Assembly or Senate, the two houses which form Pakistan's Parliament. This shows the level of social and political disempowerment of women in the tribal areas of Pakistan. Taking cognizance of the situation even women parliamentarian of Pakistan demanded of government to enact laws enabling women of tribal areas participate in politics (Law demanded for Fata women's political rights, 2005). However, the concerned governmental authorities and departments have never paid any heed to these demands.

In August 2011, the President of Pakistan Mr. Asif Zardari extended the Political Parties Act to the FATA, enabling the residents of the areas to take part in political activities. Even after that order there has been no recorded or reported participation of women in any kind of political activities in the tribal areas organized by different political parties or civil society associations. The announcement by the President of Pakistan to introduce an elected local government system in FATA in August 2012, if come to fruition, may enable women some participation in politics and self-governance.

As politics for the local government would be conducted on the community and village level, the women may get the opportunities of participation; this still would largely depend upon their family members whether they would allow women to participate in grass-root level politics. If local government structures in the form of municipal councils are established, many

women in FATA may come forward to take part in the local government processes. For instance, in 2004, when the then President of Pakistan General Pervez Musharraf formed nominated agency councils in FATA, one female in Khyber Agency named Shaheen Jan Shinwari also came forward and was sworn in as a member .

The Educational Status of Women in FATA

The existing female literacy rate in FATA, which collectively is around three percent,⁹ is perhaps the lowest in the World. On the other hand the dropout rate among girl students in FATA is 70.6 percent.¹⁰ Despite being few in number, girls' schools have been working in FATA for many decades, but still such low literacy rate among women speaks volumes of the social indifference and impediments at the community level to the women education in FATA. The educational status of women apart from the low literacy rate can also be gauged from the government's discriminatory allocation of public funds for the establishment of male and female schools.¹¹ In recent years some girls' colleges have also been inaugurated in the tribal areas, but even they have failed to make a difference. On the other hand in many areas of FATA where Taliban have had control, they forcibly closed down girls' school while banning female education and warning the parents not to send their daughters to schools. At the same time the militants justifying violence in the name of Islam have been bombing and razing girls' schools in the entire tribal areas. This has immensely affected the female enrolment rates in schools¹² (HRCP, 2011).

Here it is important to note that the bombing of girls schools may have been justified in the name of Islam but it is basically the manifestation of the social attitudes of the male members of *Pakhtun* tribes of FATA towards women in general and female education in particular. An important aspect of the girls' educational institutions in the tribal areas is the non-availability of qualified and trained teachers locally. Girls' schools in FATA

could not be efficiently and meaningfully run without the availability of the qualified female teachers. Traditionally, there have been a very few women teachers available in FATA as most of the female imparting education in the girls' schools of FATA have been going to and from on regular basis from the adjoining district of KPK. However, due to adverse security situation many of these female teachers have stopped going to FATA. Some of them were even killed by the militants.

This situation has badly affected the educational institutions of FATA and the little educational activities which used to take place there have also vanished. Keeping in view the extremely low literacy rate among females in FATA and the threat by the militants and their activities specifically of bombing girls' schools, it is almost unthinkable that the women section of the FATA population could be developed and they could play any role in the overall development of FATA.

The Economic Status of Women in FATA

The economic status of women of FATA is no better than their social, political and educational status. Women work in the agriculture fields and look after the livestock which is the main sources of livelihood of residents of FATA, but they have no direct share in the income generated from these sectors. Whereas, keeping in view the social values of Pakistan and *Pakhtuns* in particular, tribeswomen do not engage in any kind of business activities. Even women-specific chores like tailoring women clothes is not a practice in FATA.

An important determinant of someone's economic status is one's share in inheritance. As women in FATA do not inherit or own any property, they have a very low economic status.

The right to property, one of the fundamental human rights, has been totally denied to women amongst *Pakhtun* tribes residing in FATA. Traditional land distribution amongst *Pakhtun* entitles men alone ownership of property. Land is

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divided in *quom* (tribe), *khel* (clan), *tapa*, *kandae* (sub-clans), *plareena* (plural of father) and finally *plar* (father) or *naghare* (chimney). In FATA, with the exception of Kurram Agency, land settlement has not been documented. Individual land ownership in the tribe is oral but well known to succeeding generations. Pukhtunwali does not allow a woman to own land independently and be known to the people on her own (Khan & Afridi).

The reforms and legislation carried out to ensure the women's rights of inheritance in Pakistan have not had any impact on women in FATA, as the region is still out of the jurisdiction of Pakistani courts and laws. The most sordid aspect is that women of FATA have had little awareness regarding their economic rights. Whereas, those women who got higher education outside FATA have become somewhat aware of their economic rights and wanted to bring some change in their ancestral areas irrespective of dangers they face. One such woman, Farida from Khyber Agency, who attempted to create economic rights awareness among women of her area, was killed in her village Ghundi Killi, a subdivision of Jamrud on July 4, 2012.

The Social Status and the Process of Development

The individual's participation in the development of society rests on his/her social, political, economic and educational status. Putting it the other way, a society or community's development is largely dependent upon the composite status of sizable part of its members. If the majority of the population of a social setting is deprived and marginalized on all the aforementioned grounds, such a society cannot be expected to attain higher levels of development and to get modernized both physically and psychologically. Whereas, progress is impossible if women have absolutely no role in this area - FATA is such a case. The critical roles which women play and have historically played in the developed and modernized communities and countries in the above-mentioned arenas empirically transpires that one of the key factors responsible for extreme underdevelopment in FATA is the

total disempowerment of women of FATA. There are two related perceptions - extreme marginalization of women in the FATA and the critical need of development of the FATA - which ought to be reconciled. Otherwise those who want to develop FATA without alleviating the conditions of women are simply naive.

The Condition of Women and its Relation with Militancy in FATA

Apparently, the condition of women have no direct relation with the militancy, which is being carried out in the name of Islam across the country by certain armed groups making use of their sanctuaries in tribal belts and calling themselves Taliban. However, a deeper look on the situation would reveal that both factors have gelled together very strongly.

The foremost linkage between the disempowerment of females in FATA and the militancy is the lack of proper upbringing and socialization of many of the militants by their mothers. Having marginalized social status due to ignorance of the outside world, because of illiteracy and political and economic disempowerment, the women of tribal areas could hardly raise their children with the values of tolerance, self-restraint, altruism and above all a contextualized and dispassionate understanding of religion. The capacity and ability of women to make decisions depends largely upon the education, experience, genetics, and comprehension of exact and contextualized meanings of the Islamic scripture. A boy who has been brought up properly by a mother is more likely not to develop violent character or traits and this is equally true regarding male youth of FATA.

As half of the population of FATA comprising women has been out of the political process and political arena, its natural corollary is the creation of a huge political vacuum. In case of FATA, the relationship between the political vacuum and the rise of extremism and terrorism in the name of Islam is most important (Khan R. , 2012). If women of FATA would have political sensitization they would know the value of resolving disputes

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through political means and not through resorting to violence and militancy. The same understanding could be transferred to their male family members and thus the first line of counter-extremism and counterterrorism could be created within the immediate family environment of the tribesmen. The key argument against the participation of women in FATA is that their nature is incompatible with the dynamics of politics while the social values of the region do not allow women to play any role outside the home. This argument is given by tribesmen, who are all powerful and do not want to change the status quo in which they enjoy extraordinary powers. However, if provided the opportunity and choice women would love to play a role in politics. According to Chairperson, Tribal Women Association, Begum Jan, women of Mohmand Agency, Bajaur, Khyber, Kurram and South Waziristan were educated and were keen to participate in the political process, but the Political Agents and influential tribal leaders were creating hurdles in their way (Law demanded for Fata women's political rights, 2005).

Had the majority or even one-fourth of the women of FATA got education up to matriculation, they could develop the rudimentary understanding that whatever the militants have been doing is nothing to do with religion and is only due to the vested interests of the extremist and terrorist groups. Consequently, they could educate their sons, if not brothers, husbands and fathers, that militancy and terrorism is anti-social and has nothing to do with Islam. An educated male youth from Bajaur, Irfanullah says, "If our women get educated, chances are they will, in turn, ensure that their children do not become militants" (Ebrahim, 2012). But the other side of the situation is that Taliban have banned girls' education in areas under their control and this has and would increase militancy in FATA (HRCP, 2011).

As far as economic empowerment of women in FATA and their role in countering religious extremism and terrorism is concerned, there is a deep but imperceptible linkage between the two. According to many analysts, experts and scholars, economic

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deprivation of the residents of FATA has been the underlying cause of religious extremism and terrorism. This is largely correct in many respects because due to closed economic system and insignificant agriculture sector in the tribal areas and the completely inexistent industries, inhabitants have to face extreme poverty and large-scale unemployment. Resultantly, in order to have some meaningful pastime, status and some money, which foreign and local militants groups provide to their recruits, a number of male youth have joined militant groups operating there.

Therefore, if women are economically empowered they could fully participate in the economic endeavours of their family particularly in growing crops, vegetables and fruits on the family landholdings apart from looking after the livestock and coming up with ideas to increase the number of cattle heads and the production of milk, butter, ghee, and cheese. Once the family incomes improve there would be little chances for the male youth to join the extremist and militant organizations.

Some may disagree that women could serve as a preventive filter to counter radicalization and terrorism in the name of Islam. However, a counterargument is the example of the TTP Swat Chapter Head, Maulana Fazalullah, nicknamed Radio Mullah. Fazalullah first targeted the women population of Swat through his distorted religious sermons on his FM radio transmitter to cultivate support for his designs of establishing his dictatorship in the Swat valley. In fact, it was the women support mainly in the shape of contributing their gold and other ornaments and accumulated money to Fazalullah that the latter could create a base for his organization and agenda in Swat.

A rabid Mullah without any education and with a mere gift-of-the-gab, could galvanize the whole female population of Swat, then why could not the state motivate these women to get education and take part in the economic life of their community? In this regard the state with all the paraphernalia of FM radio channels, the state-managed Pakistan Television (PTV), Radio Pakistan, and above all the government-run female schools in

FATA under its control, could easily improve the status of women. This is possible only if the political leadership has a clear vision, policy and strategies in this regard.

Women (in FATA) professed moderate version of Islam. They condemned militancy in the name of Islam and ethnic differences. They said Islam does not sanction killing people. Women in Kurram said *Sunni* and *Shia* are both Muslims and lived like brothers and sisters. The political administration creates differences and pitches them against each other (Khan & Afridi).

Conclusion

The fact that underdevelopment in FATA is largely due to the disempowerment of the female population the future of the development process calls for initiatives and interventions to empower the women population for the region. This is a challenging task. However, the most pertinent question is if the political leadership realizes these challenges and plans to overpower them. The mainstream political leadership of Pakistan save Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Islam Fazlur Rahman faction (JUI-F) and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) led by Imran Khan do not seem to have a clear understanding of the situation in the FATA; even Rahman's and Khan's comprehension of the situation in FATA have personal reasons. Fazlur Rahman himself resides in Dera Ismail Khan, the doorway to South Waziristan, and his party has had traditional roots in the tribal areas due to its religious character, compatible with the national character of the tribesmen. Likewise, Imran Khan's mother belonged to the Barki tribe of South Waziristan while he has authored a book on the tribal areas of Pakistan which demonstrates his interest and understanding of the region. Khan's consistent policy stands on certain issues like his opposition to the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) operated predator drones in FATA - which have killed hundreds of civilians other than some high profile leaders of Al Qaeda and Pakistan - and conduct of military operations by Pakistan in the region. This manifesto has earned his party a large-scale support in the tribal areas.

However, understanding of the dynamics and situation in the tribal areas of Pakistan only by Maulana Fazl and Imran Khan is not sufficient to bring forth a collective vision of the State to address the issues of development and militancy in the FATA. In this regard, all the political parties must come forward along with their FATA leadership to seek a consensus for a way forward in the development of tribal areas. However, women rights groups have to brief the national political leadership on the importance of the women in the development process and counterterrorism endeavours of the state in the tribal areas.

Notes

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- ¹ Officially the tribal districts are called ‘agencies’ since the British colonial rule in India.
 - ² According to the 1998 Census of Pakistan, population of FATA comprised 3,176, 331 inhabitants including 1,652,047 men and 1,524,284 women (Census of Pakistan Report, 1998). At the end of 2012 the estimated population of FATA is around 4. 5 million nearly equal proportion of males and females. However, inhabitants of FATA argue the actual population is more than seven million and the government authorities deliberately reflect a low population to avoid giving the region its rightful share of resources.
 - ³ Technically it is not a marriage because from Islamic point of view a marriage is contracted out of freewill of the parties concerned but marriage under *Swara* is solemnized under duress in which there is no volition of the girl involved.
 - ⁴ The entire FATA border the KP province of Pakistan while only a small part touches the Balochistan province. Traditionally the residents of FATA have been entirely dependent for their day to day necessities and health and educational facilities on the adjoining districts of KP.
 - ⁵ Social sanction is a reaction (or the threat or promise of a reaction) by members of a social group indicating approval or disapproval of a mode of conduct and serving to enforce behavioral standards of the group (Britannica Online Dictionary), (<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/521848/sanction>) Accessed on December 8, 2012.
 - ⁶ Jirga is a mechanism among Pakhtun particularly tribes of FATA in which old men of authority of a tribe, without having any legal

knowledge decide intertribal and intra-tribal disputes through application of ‘wisdom’ and resorting to customs.

⁷ Interview with Imran Khan Wazir, a resident of South Waziristan working as Pakistan Television (PTV) Producer and is a well-known observer and critic of tribal areas politics and society.

⁸ “First the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act (Act No.1 of 2005) which is commonly known as the honour killing law. Through that law various amendments were made in the Pakistan Penal Code and the Criminal Procedure Code with the objective to check those provisions which supported the offenders in honour-related offences. Similarly, for the first time the inhuman practice of giving females to rival groups in marriages for settling blood feuds was also declared a penal offence punishable up to ten years rigorous imprisonment. The second law is the Code of Criminal Procedure (Amendment) Ordinance, 2006, dealing with granting of bail to female offenders. That ordinance was first promulgated on July 8, 2006, and subsequently re-promulgated in March 2007 and July 2007. After remaining in the field for over four years and re-promulgated several times the ordinance lapsed in Aug 2010. However, during its presence the ordinance was not extended to FATA and Pata. Similarly, the Protection of Women (Criminal Laws Amendment) Act, 2006, commonly known as the Women Protection Act, was given assent by the President of Pakistan on Nov 30, 2006, after it was passed by the National Assembly and Senate. Despite the passage of more than five years the law is yet to be extended to the tribal areas and presently the controversial Hudood ordinance is applicable there in its original shape” (Shah 2012).

⁹ Census of Pakistan Report, 1998.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ “Number of schools for girls and boys reflect gender bias in allocations of funds for schools. Total number of primary schools in FATA: 3,297 comprising 2,015 boys’ and 1,282 girls’ schools. Total 404 middle schools comprise: 282 boys’ and 122 girls’ schools. Total 231 high schools comprise: 205 boys’ and 26 girls’ schools. Out of 10 Higher Secondary Schools, 8 are for boys, and only 2 for girls; out of 32 colleges, 21 are for boys and 11 for girls. There are 9 Government Technical Institutes and 6 Commerce Colleges in FATA, none of them admit women. Disparity in the numbers of educational and technical institutes reveals indifference of the

authorities towards gender equity, female education and cultural sensitivities” (Khan & Afridi).

- ¹² The report said not a single girl got admission to 9th class in Bajaur, FR Kohat and FR Lakki Marwat during 2009-10 due to Taliban threats, while degrees colleges of Bajaur, FR Lakki Marwat and FR Peshawar reported no admission by girls during the said period on the same grounds. .. Some 120,000 female students in Fata were forced to quit schools due to Taliban threats (Taliban fear forcing tribal girls to join seminaries: HRCP, 2011). According to it, the Taliban’s opposition to the girls’ education, propaganda against it through illegal FM radio channels, issuance of threats, wall chalking declaring the girls’ education vulgarity and un-Islamic are preventing parents from sending their daughters to schools for formal education.

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