



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**FATA Merger: Impacts on Status of Tribal Women**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study examines the merging of the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and its effects on the status of Pashtun tribal women. The major goals were to comprehend the tribal traditions and standards that have traditionally impeded the development of women, and to examine the impact of integrating changes on improving women's rights in the area. The stereotypes associated with women not only impede their ability to contribute to the progress of the state, but also deprive them of their basic rights. This issue is especially concerning in less developed nations such as Pakistan, where gender inequalities are more noticeable. The study employs a qualitative research methodology to examine the impact of FATA merger on the tribal women. This study elucidates the connection between tribal practices and the possibility of change, emphasizing the important contribution of women to the socio-economic progress of the region. This study recommends that to promote and enhance the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), both the national and provincial government should prioritize the inclusion of women in economic endeavors and engage them in decision-making procedures.

**KEYWORDS** Erstwhile, FATA, Patriarchy, Pukhtun, Tribal Women

**Introduction**

Women, constituting half of the population in every community, contribute to the progress and advancement of a state. To achieve complete development, it is important to effectively incorporate the potential of women into society. Regrettably, a multitude of societal and political conventions heavily influence the gender-specific demands placed upon women, frequently restricting them to domestic settings and regarding them as passive recipients of benefits. This exclusion deprives a substantial segment of the population the chance to make meaningful contribution to the advancement of society.

The stereotypes associated with women not only impede their ability to contribute to the progress of the state, but also deprive them of their basic rights. This issue is especially concerning in less developed nations such as Pakistan, where gender inequalities are more noticeable. The previous administrative framework of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) worsened the difficult situation faced by women from the tribal communities. According to Articles 246 and 247 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan 1973, the region was exempt from legislative laws and instead ruled by the President of Pakistan through the Governor of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Nevertheless, the much anticipated 31st Amendment Bill has abolished this oppressive system of administration providing the people of this area with optimism for their future and a transformation from being mere subjects to being authentic citizens in both principle and practice. The integration of erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) into the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) region offers tribal women a chance to pursue enhanced living conditions. The current parliamentary act designed to promote the advancement of women will now extend its coverage to include women belonging to tribes, granting them the right to seek justice in all courts (Khan, 2012).

Mainstreaming will be hard despite enthusiasm and drive. Effective execution demands a thorough, forward-thinking, and disciplined plan. This study explores how the merger of FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa influenced Pashtun tribal women's status. How have tribal norms hindered women's advancement? How do patriarchal structures and customs oppress women throughout life? What initiatives are needed to include women in economic decision-making? This essay examines these questions to determine the obstacles and potential for advancing women's rights and duties in the region's socioeconomic development. This article concludes that the FATA merger could enhance Pashtun tribal women's conditions by understanding and addressing women's development impediments and administrative adjustments.

### **Literature Review**

Women are generally objectified and being suppressed by the patriarchal norms being practiced in the society. Norms like Sharmila at (loss of inheritance), miratah (denying issueless women property), and ghag (forced marriage) demonstrate this inequality as well as Dowry, badala/swara, and ghairat degrade women and suppress the rights (Muzaffar, et. al. 2018; Naseer, 2018).

Women considered a property without legal Islamic protections. Swara, Vulvar, and Tor treat women poorly by exploiting them to settle conflicts and transfer ownership for money. Economically, women cannot inherit or start businesses. They rarely vote and are exploited by men. FATA has one of the lowest literacy rates due to government neglect, terrorism, and conservative parenting. Militancy has kept women at home, worsening their predicament (Khan, 2012).

Despite Musharraf's efforts to mainstream women and enlarge reserved seats, women have less decision-making power. Women face barriers to political participation due to party institutions and domestic issues. Political parties use women for election campaigns but rarely give them prominent roles or winnable seats. Reserved seat MPs rarely become ministers and are often figureheads. Male relatives sway female voters and harass female politicians (Zakar & Hamid 2018).

FATA-Khyber Pakhtunkhwa merger a key event in Pakistan's history in "Challenges of FATA Merger" (2018). He thinks extending provincial laws to tribal regions will abolish 'off-limits areas', destroy armed groups, and improve government and justice. Yusufzai acknowledges the merger's challenges, notably in the next general elections, where people lack democratic experience. Security and development depend on security forces, and FATA is normalising slowly (Yusafzai, 2018).

Pakistan's claim to the territory against Afghanistan, inhabitants' economic and political conditions, and security increase with the FATA merger. However, they also worry about Pakistan's policy execution and the KP provincial government's limited authority during merging (Shad & Ahmed, 2018).

In his 2018 book "Mainstreaming Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas, Reform Initiatives and Roadblocks," Imtiaz Ali examines the pros and cons of integrating FATA into KP. He stresses that tribal governance's historical effects hinder FATA's social and economic development. Ali sees the merger as a source of optimism for the local population, bringing constitutional protections, modern law enforcement, local administration, and development projects. However, he acknowledges internal divisions and political opposition to the merger. To ensure reform success, Ali emphasises government dedication, extensive planning, appropriate financial resources, and rigorous security (Ali, 2018).

Suzzane Slusser's 2009 article "Gender Empowerment and Gender Inequality, the Global Economy and the State: Exploring the Relationship Between Economic Dependency,

the Political Order and Women's Status" attacks gender-biased development theories like Modernization Theory, Dependency Theory, and World System Theory. The gendered assumptions behind these theories and feminist scholars' interpretations are questioned. According to Slusser, 1950s economists embraced Modernization Theory, which blamed cultural issues and poor institutions for impoverished countries' economic decline. Developing nations should emulate developed nations' growth, while developed nations should aid and finance (Slusser 2009).

Noor Akbar's 2010 report "Women Rights in FATA Pakistan" examines NGOs' challenges in advancing women's rights in FATA. He promotes tribal culture, which views women as belongings and gives men honor. Traditional society distrusts Western non-governmental groups since women's rights are controversial. Women's rights NGOs are often persecuted, especially if they violate Islamic or local conventions. Akbar advises NGOs to communicate well to overcome these issues. Public awareness, respect for local traditions, and community leader involvement are key (Akbar, 2010).

Ester Boserup's Women's Role in Economic Development criticized Modernization Theory for ignoring women's development. She increased women's access to formal money, education, politics, etc. Dependency Theory and World System Theory criticized Modernization Theory's gendered enhanced WID model by Marxist-Feminist finance and Centre governments' mistreatment of fringe states. Halfway, the theory proposes shady connections between rich and helpless nations through inconsistent global market trade rates, MNCs, and world financial gathering Structural Adjustment Programmes, but it doesn't address women's maltreatment. Gender and Development used Marxist-Feminist nexus instead of WID. GAD pioneers say WID makes women vulnerable to entrepreneurs. They attack WID for worrying about women's financial reconciliation and abusing them with triple responsibility of rearing, caring for, and recreating under market influences. GAD promotes women's financial coordination and equal offer in all circles and rejects man-centric culture. State and global institutions like the UN must promote women and remove sexual orientation-based segregation to give them equal opportunities in all sectors before the end. (Boserup&Toulmin2013)

## **Methodology**

This study examines the social practices of Pakhtun culture in FATA under FCR, focusing on the impact of government attempts to merge this area with the rest of the terrain over women. The research aims to understand the reasons behind women's struggles and their assumptions about new mainstreaming activities by the public authority. The study uses qualitative methods, including theoretical reviews, case studies, historical analysis, biography, ethnography, discourse analysis, ground theory, and phenomenology. The population of the study includes women from tribal areas, mostly residing in cities, aged 21 or above, and students of sociology and gender studies at HEC recognized universities. Data was collected through questionnaires, with participants from urban areas with tribal connections. Secondary sources included reports, articles, books, and scientific commentaries available in print or online forms, mainly from the library and the internet.

## **Results and Discussion**

Pakistan's newly merged tribal districts' women are generally treated poorly and inferior to men. Poor health, harassment, honor killing, and economic dependence plague them. Tribal women are unaware of their political rights and underrepresented in provincial and national assemblies. They lack primary and technical education. Family life is depressing, with women blamed for crimes. FATA is often blamed for atrocities and has early marriages due to its feudal culture. Pakistan must strengthen Pakhtun tribal women's social, cultural, political, and economic status to make the FATA-Khyber Pakhtunkhwa merger work.

The Pakistani government liberated clans and tribes from colonial rule when tribal society, liberty, and human rights advocates vigorously condemned the repressive FCR. The FATA reform plan was remembered for Pakistan's twenty-point counterterrorism National Action Plan (NAP) in December 2014, which was the key advancement. (Ahmed, Ishaq, & Shoaib, 2021)

FATA's MPs repeatedly petitioned the public authority to annul FCR and unify the area with KP, sparking the consolidation debate. Thus, then-Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif created a rare six-member FATA Reforms Committee (FRC) led by his attorney Sartaj Aziz (Ali 2018). Even though tribal society strongly condemned the synthesis of this advisory group for its newness with FATA, the council members worked and spent eight months talking to all FATA partners before choosing to consolidate with KP and avoiding a different area.(Ali 2018)

On May 31, 2018, the President of Pakistan signed the newest draft of the 25th amendment to the Constitution of Pakistan, marking a milestone for FATA. FATA reforms expanded the equitable framework, presented current police, created local government, and launched a wide range of financial and social development initiatives to protect FATA's people. This package equalizes ancestral zones with other terrain through political, legal, regulatory, security, and financial reforms.

Eight articles of Pakistan's 1973 constitution changed with the 25th amendment. This amends FATA and KP to eliminate their distinction. The NA loses 12 FATA seats and wins KP seats. Pakistan lost 8 FATA Senate seats. Without precedent in Pakistani history, FATA members are given shared portrayal by increasing KP common meeting seats from 124 to 145. Removing Article 247, which gave FATA central government jurisdiction for authoritative, regulatory, legal, and monetary problems, was the biggest change. FATA High Court and Pakistan Supreme Court expansion. Unusually, FATA MPs choose their house. The 25th Amendment standardizes Pakistan and administers KP FATA. The conversion of FATA people to citizens is unprecedented in Pakistan's 70-year history (Zubair 2018).

### **Women's status and their dimensions:**

The following are the different dimensions of women's status.

#### **Social status**

FATA, a tribal community in Pakistan, is a male-dominated society where women are seen as second-rate compared to men. Pukhtun norms and cultures view boys as resources and pride, while girls are seen as burdens. Many daughters in FATA live as a burden, owing their existence to patriarchal lords and being chained to illegal self-made laws and norms (Khan, 2012).

In the tribesmen's self-proclaimed dignified culture, Swara, Vulvar, Tor, and Ghag brutally humiliate women. Often, a tribeswoman's honor killing is used to punish rivals by killing their own woman with a rival man. A moveable woman is typically viewed as private property, transferred from her father to her husband for a fee. Women cannot inherit property or run businesses in their name. They play a small role in politics and are generally influenced by men when voting (Khan 2012).

The submissive attitude of women stems from their belief in men's superiority and their culture's perfection. This Riway and superior attitude have historically oppressed women, despite their parents' daily practices. The submissive attitude is result of these experiences, leading to a preference for avoiding challenging these norms. Redefining the patriarchal social structure and recognizing women as equal members of society can help address this issue. (Naseer, 2015)

## **Economic Status**

Pukhtun tribal women in newly united tribal territories are marginalized financially. A family's backbone is a regular person. She handles all housework. She does errands, laundry, cleaning, and cooking. She doesn't consider her day job financial. She mocked her homebound position at day's end. Even middle-class women who support their families have many hurdles. Indigenous women are behind due to a lack of educational facilities, yet she wants to teach to spend more time on housekeeping. Because teaching is part-time, she is underpaid in private and government institutions. Russian revolutionary Trotsky said, "Woman is the slave of the slaves."

Tribal women work alongside their men in agriculture and raising cattle, but they also take care of their children, fathers, and husbands. Women work in the same time as men, but their labor ends within the house. Tribal men do not share even a small amount of earning with them, despite their different needs. Tribal women often seek opportunities where men are in a happy mood to ask for a little money, as they have many different needs to fulfill. (Naseer 2018).

The most important economic factor is inheritance, yet women in recently combined tribal communities do not inherit or own land, confirming their poverty. Without a son, father, brother, or husband, tribal Riway women are male property and socially inferior (USAID Report). In "Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State" Frederick Engels claims underdeveloped nations enslave women (Engels & Untermann, 2021). Dependence on financially independent, impoverished males makes Orakzai women slaves. The bride's money is all women get from marriage. However, women need money. Although she never coveted her father's money, she needed to meet her fundamental needs. Men find it needless, and women invariably suffer (Engels & Untermann, 2021).

## **Cultural status**

Culturally, tribal women are abused in their families. In a traditional tribal family, the breadwinner guy decides everything. Tribal men make all life decisions, from education and marriage to small matters. The existence of women merely validates men's rules for women. She faces physical violence or abuse if she refuses.

The tribal woman in Erstwhile FATA likewise worries about her home life. She's homeless. A tribal Pukhtun lives with their father as a child, with their husband as an adult, and with their son as estate. She relies on her husband financially and socially. Raja Gidh, by prominent Urdu novelist Banu Qudsiya, states that middle-class women want stability rather than love from their husbands. If a city girl needed this, think how miserable tribal Pukhtun women in these underprivileged and less sophisticated merging regions must be (Shaikh, 2020). Tribal women have less respect and less power in the home. She is beaten for little concerns. Tribal men require respect and attention. His clothing must be ironed, his room clean, and dinner prepared. But women are discriminated against in care. Even when sick, nobody notices her. The disrespect and intolerance begin in her family. Most patriarchal traditions are feudal. Feudal norms affect women. Many poor tribal girls marry before adulthood. Parents recommend early marriage for girls. Poor folks don't care about girls' education or careers. Her sole occupation is housewifery. The fundamental reason women are submissive is that they have embraced men as superior and their culture as immaculate. Despite the Riway and male superiority's constant use to oppress and exploit women. The main reason kids hold such beliefs is since they see their parents upholding them daily. Their mentality is largely shaped by those events, which made them avoid challenging these standards. The merger has given former FATA residents access to the legal system, although they are unwilling to appeal women's cases. Still, preferring a women's case to court is looked down upon as disrespectful to man and the tribal Riway. This attitude of tribal males shows the internal hurdles to justice for women in the patriarchal tribal

mindset. External attempts like giving tribal people access to mainland laws are commendable, but they are not the only option. The patriarchal tribal social system must be reconstructed for reforms to benefit women. Men and women in tribal societies must remember that women are equals, not children of a lesser god. They have the same rights as tribesmen. In tribal settings, feudal lords control women's fates. An illiterate tribal Pukhtun woman hates this corrupt culture. (Shaikh,2020).

### **Political status**

Women were traditionally excluded from FATA politics. After election reforms in 1996, Pakistani President Farooq Ahmed Khan Leghari granted FATA inhabitants universal suffrage. Thus, native women could vote. In the 1997 general elections, many FATA women voted, but their male family members influenced them to vote against rival tribes' nominees. Tribal National Assembly candidates have received minimal female votes in national elections since. Most tribal areas' candidates and communities, under the domineering influence of local clergy, agreed not to let women vote. Importantly, no FATA woman has been elected to the National Assembly or Senate, Pakistan's Parliament. This reveals how socially, and politically oppressed tribal Pakistani women are. Even Pakistani women legislators asked that the government pass laws allowing tribal women to vote (Law demanded Fata women's political rights, 2005). Government officials and ministries have ignored these demands. (Khan, 2022)

### **Merger's Effect on Women in Newly Merged Tribal Districts:**

The newly united tribal districts of Erstwhile FATA has never enjoyed legal protection for women. Their endeavours were done under an unwritten Pashtun code (Tribal Riway), not Shariah or other legal process. These districts did not use women's amicable laws like Muslim Family Law Ordinance and Women Protection Law. Jirga was FATA's legitimate governance system, and Maliks and other tribal people dominated it. Unfortunately, women under FCR had no legal rights on one side and were disciplined for their men's actions on the other. In 2011, president Asif Ali Zardari made some amendments to these punitive rules, exempting elderly males, women, and children from punishment (Khan 2012).

Riway patriarchal customs are strengthened in modern FATA under FCR. Like the Sword of Damocles, Tor, Vulvar, and Ghag rule tribal girls. Women's rights are violated and killed for honour without consequence since there is no legal framework. The Swara practice, which entails repaying an executioner's family with a young girl, is becoming rare in established Pakhtun regions of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). Swara breaches women's rights, common liberty, and Islamic orders, while tribal males bravely offer their honour to foes to avert counterattacks and unite.

The zone still performs Vulvar or Ser Paisa, or Bride's head money, although Swara, a tribal custom, is declining. Ancestral men who should not marry their sisters are maliciously practicing this insulting ritual in FATA and Pashtun tribal social norms. Tor is another degrading tribal ceremony for women, involving the accusation of illicit relationships, frequently resulting in honour killings. Women are executed for being close or talking to men, and expressing desire to be like one risks death. Tor is often used by men to intimidate rivals without consequence.

The Ghag convention in tribal societies emphasizes male-centricity, referring to a man's desire to marry a specific woman. If his proposal is rejected, he expresses outrage and fires outside, implying he has the first offer. Ghag elevates men over women.

In December 2019, a young man and woman were hanged in Khandu for alleged illegal affairs. The author was in college when a classmate shared the tragic incident. The

author questions the honor of women, dauntlessness, and Pushto where honest men and women are slain for honor, as tribesmen do not question the executioner.

A terrible event led to a post-consolidation FATA, where security personnel found no sexual issues between the victims. The guilty party was sentenced to life in prison, with the court deciding whether to sentence or exonerate the culprit when the victim's child becomes an adult. The guilty individual was released on bond, but the victim's relatives didn't attend.

Tribal traditions in FATA women often view them as property of tribal men, with gold and land considered non-living resources. Tribesmen also take on the responsibility of protecting women's honor, setting independent standards for their dignity. For instance, discussing career or life partners with a man could result in their denial of their right to live.

Socially created gender roles and statuses distinguish gender from sex, according to feminists. Men are deemed superior due to early experiences and repeated performances. This implies that men are superior to women. Gender Performativity theory by Judith Butler holds that all sexes act gender in society and are not born with it. Social norms determine these roles, and individuals who defy them are marginalized. Butler opposes gender naturalization and fulfilment, while Freud believed childhood events shaped adult personalities.

The merger of former FATA residents has provided access to the legal system, but tribal males still refuse to appeal women's cases, highlighting the internal hurdles for women in the patriarchal tribal mindset. External attempts like mainland laws are commendable, but the patriarchal tribal social system must be reconstructed for reforms benefiting women, who are equal community members with equal rights. (Naseer 2018).

### **Role of Women in Political Affairs after merging**

Erstwhile FATA has historically been marginalized in political issues, with women and the general public often excluded from the political arena. The introduction of the universal adult establishment in 1996 and the central government's direct executive control have contributed to this. The tribal society's misogyny further hinders women's political support. However, the 25th amendment has addressed these issues, but the attitudes towards political interest and patriarchal structures remain a concern.

The patriarchal social structure in newly merged districts deters women from participating in political races, often preventing them from making choices. Tribal men often prevent women from participating, and competition, tribal elites, and the pastorate often enforce restrictions on women's election participation. (Zakar, Hamid 2018).

The political landscape for women in FATA is challenging, with few challenging any political race and achieving political conquest being a fantasy. Women who escape their homes are often directed by their co-tribesmen to crush their opponents or fulfill their patronal responsibilities with discretionary applicants, highlighting the challenges faced by women in the political arena.

Pakistani women face similar challenges in politics as FATA women, despite efforts to mainstream women into politics, such as General Pervez Musharraf's increase in reserved seats. Family issues and the internal structure of political parties and government agencies make working for women difficult. Women are often used for campaigning and not given party tickets, and rarely hold significant ministerial positions. Female politicians in mainstream Pakistan face misbehavior from male bureaucrats, and in established parts, male family members dictate their votes. Ironically, some local candidates and community members sign pre-poll pacts to keep women out of elections.

## **Conclusion**

The merger of Erstwhile FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has affected Pukhtun tribal women, exposing tribal local traditions and mainstreaming's impact on regional women's privileges. The 25th amendment grants former FATA residents equal protection, letting MPs decide their region's fate. Tribal customs still enslave FATA women, and Pashtunwali rites emphasise gender performance. The newly combined districts have the lowest literacy rate, poor women's education and health, gender disparity, and no girls' schools. Due to their dependence on agriculture and cattle, FATA women do not make decisions. The Gender And Development hypothesis states that involving women in development exploits and overburdens them with reproducing, feeding, and creating. National or provincial governments should involve women in financial operations and address their decision-making organisation to promote newly amalgamated districts.

## **Recommendations**

Equivalent commitment is crucial for community development in Pakistan, especially for women who comprise half of society. Despite the incorporation of Erstwhile FATA into mainstream Pakistan, women's plight remains high, with low literacy rates, severe health hazards, and economic dependency on men. The government's Ten Years Development Plan aims to improve the financial state of Erstwhile FATA, but no projects incorporate women into development processes. There is a dire need for women's inclusion in educational, economic, and political activities to improve their condition.

## **Economic reforms for Tribal women**

Frederick Engels' work, "Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State," illustrates FATA women's economic problems. These districts' women depend on males who are poor and financially independent. Despite contributing equally to agriculture and animals, women have never shared household revenues. They must care for their children, fathers, and husbands and confront daily challenges.(Naseer 2018)

Inheritance is the most important determinant of one's economic status, but women in FATA do not inherit nor own any land or property. They are treated as movable property of males without social recognition. The only money spent on women is the sar paisay (bride's money) during her marriage.

Gender-blind government mainstreaming in FATA following the merger does not affect women's economic conditions. NGOs improve women's economic status slightly. The government should create projects that allow women to earn and spend money autonomously and offer women crucial roles in government to influence decision-making.

The current status of women in education, health, and economics is gloomy in Erstwhile FATA, with inadequate schools, inadequate female teaching staff, and unfriendly local customs. The government must integrate women into the development process, particularly in education, health, and economics, to uplift their rights.

## **Political and social reform for tribal women:**

Women's political empowerment requires political training and capacity building. Quotas and affirmative action can improve women's political representation and ensure their voice in policymaking and governance. These systems can teach leadership, public speaking, campaigning, and political processes and institutions. Women candidates need equal money and campaign support. Awareness and advocacy efforts can challenge gender stereotypes and encourage women to participate in politics. Legal reforms and gender-sensitive policies can help women participate in politics and advance their rights.



Supporting women's civil society and grassroots movements may mobilise women and promote awareness, making governments accountable for gender equality. Dialogue and lobbying with traditional and religious leaders can transform social norms and attitudes that perpetuate gender-based discrimination and political exclusion. By focusing on these areas, the government may empower women politically, ensure their meaningful participation in decision-making, and promote more inclusive and representative governance.

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