

Rituals and Challenges regarding Women in Ex-Fata Areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

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Abstract

A look into the relationship between rituals and barriers faced by women in what used to be known as Federally Administered Tribal Areas FATA of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) from an Islamic view is investigated under this study. The research is based on certain socio-cultural practices that mark what it means to be a woman residing in this part of the globe and also attempts at understanding how these cultural customs transform women's everyday life. Additionally, the analysis shows various issues women face in these areas ranging from social-economic problems to education disparities and poor health provision. From the perspective of Islamic teachings, these challenges are critically analyzed revealing how religious principles interface with local practices and can impact women's status and welfare.

This study using the analysis of rituals and challenges intends to offer a subtle understanding about how some aspects can be taken related for women in ex-FATA regions of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The study also explores potential approaches to women's empowerment from the perspective of Islamic principles in order to offer helpful advice to researchers, practitioners, and policy makers working to advance gender equity and development in this area.

Keywords: Women, Rituals, Islamic teachings, Ex-Fata Areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Introduction

The federal or central government of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan considers FATA regions as part of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. However, the government governing these areas is nothing like the provincial government. It is based on the canons of Islam and the traditional customs of related tribes. It is important to understand the centrally important issues and customs that apply to women in these areas from an Islamic perspective these are societies with life-enhancing rituals that are many of times observed during life-cycle rituals such as marriage; birth and death. Each tribe has its own distinctive rituals that may be religious or associated with initiation into a group.¹

Although customs such as these might aid in maintaining ethnic identity and fortifying social ties, they can also pose difficulties for women. Islamic values support women's equality, respect, and dignity; The Holy Quran says that “O mankind, fear your Lord, who created you from one soul and created from it its mate and dispersed from both of them many men and women. And fear Allah, through whom you ask one another, and the wombs. Indeed Allah is ever, over you, an Observer”.² But, under particular circumstances and during rituals, bad behaviors might occasionally be encouraged for women or possibilities for them to be restricted.³ For instance: Strict gender segregation can be imposed by a number of traditional traditions in the Ex-FATA territories, which limits women's movement and involvement in public spaces and social life. Women are not allowed to travel freely, and are not provided with many educational opportunities. These difficulties have the ability to stifle their growth, preventing them from reaching their full potential.

A modified perspective may be helpful in elucidating these difficulties. Islam's teachings on justice, compassion, and communication must be upheld when evaluating the position or rights of women living in the former FATA zones.

The focus on Islamic ideals that echo the ethics of justice and uniformity should be used to examine the social mores and tribal customs of the Ex-FATA, ensuring that women become aware of and involved in all social, political, and economic spheres. The tribes that lived in the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (Ex-FATA) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, were well-known for their unusual cultural customs, which combined Islamic and tribal traditions. In this regard, what was the Islamic interpretation of the customs and challenges faced by women in these regions?⁴ The tired of observed the said thing in this research work.

Creating community-based initiatives, educational and awareness programs that promote gender equality and women empowerment can help overcome these obstacles. Knowing all these issues, we could construct a society that allows women to exercise their rights while preserving the significance of their cultural traditions.⁵ The Holy Quran says that “By analyzing and finding solutions to the rituals and issues that are faced by women in ex-FATA areas, we should also be working towards a society where no one is left out. The purpose of this research work is to advocate awareness, encourage dialogue and instigate actions on gender equality and women empowerment in these geographical location. The women in ex-Fata regions have been and continue to face numerous challenges. It is crucial to examine these issues, devise effective solutions, and work towards creating an inclusive society where everyone is treated equally. Through this paper, our goal is to promote open communication, increase understanding, and take steps towards achieving gender equality and empowering women in these areas.

Basic Questions Regarding the Research Topic

There are two basic questions of this research work which are given below;

- ✓ People of the ex-Fata regions give more importance to cultural rituals as compared to Islamic teachings?
- ✓ Women of ex-Fata areas are facing many problems due to gender base discrimination?

Hypotheses of the Research

Women of ex-Fata areas have been deprived from basic rights. The Ex-Fata regions people follow the Islamic teachings and traditions of society strictly. But it is a common concept regarding the people of ex-Fata areas that they

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give more importance to cultural rituals. Due to which women face many problems and they to be deprived from their basic rights.

1. The improved education opportunities for women in Ex-FATA areas based on Islamic principles can be enhanced socio-economic status for the women and the community at large.
2. The conduction of cultural sensitization programs in conformity with Islamic values can be a very positive transformation in the cultural practices which would provide an environment that is more conducive for realization of women's rights.
3. The women economic empowerment can be initiative, for this purpose we can follow the principles of the Islamic economy, due to which to be enhanced financial independence and community development.
4. Awareness amongst women of the Islamic rights for women can justify and automatically give fair treatment and rights to women within the legal purview of Ex-FATA areas.
5. Community development projects, if formulated on the principles of Islam and with the participation of women, can develop them socially, economically, culturally, and politically.
6. Social awareness campaigns of the issues affecting women but based on Islamic solutions can increase the awareness and involvement from the community in addressing the challenges.
7. Marriage and family guidance based on the Islamic values can lead to improving the health status of family relations, growing them to a holistic level.
8. Engaging the young women in educative and recreational activities that are in line with Islamic values can instill in them the sense of responsibility which can make them active in community affairs.

Objectives of the Study

There are some objectives as below;

- I. To promote and provide easy access to education for women in the Ex-FATA areas in light of Islamic values and teachings.

2. To organizing women's educational programs to increase knowledge in the Islamic teachings, so that an attitude of justice, equality, and responsible behavior is created and women's rights are recognized.
3. To Implement of healthcare initiatives needed for women focusing on their special needs and according to Islamic ethical conduct for maintaining physical and psychological health.
4. To increase in the awareness regarding the rights of women according to Islamic law to gain their just representation in the legal environment of the region.
5. To facilitate and support the economic initiatives which benefit women and take part in the process of capacity building in practicing economic empowerment within fair trading principles and ethical business as commanded by Islam.
6. To start-up of projects for the overall uplift of Ex-FATA areas, giving special focus to increasing the involvement of women in the locally prepared and guided activities, following an Islamic creed.
7. To undertake programmes in sensitizing the community on the cultural practices that may be opposite to Islamic values, on the cultural environment that should go parallel to Islamic teachings.
8. To provide counselling services along with religious advice and support for women to help them in handling their challenges and dilemmas in the light of teachings of Islam.
9. To offer counselling services with a focus on Islamic values within marriage and family life, support for healthy relationship creation, and problem-solving from an Islamic perspective.
10. To be applied towards skill development initiatives through which women will enable getting practical skills and contributing to the national life within the Islamic principles of self-dependence.
11. To launch awareness campaigns on social issues that affect women by enlightening them on Islamic solutions to societal problems while involving community members in the same.
12. To engage the womenfolk in the pursuit of social, educational, and entertainment activities in accordance with Islamic values with a view to

creating a sense of being responsible and active participants in community affairs.

Traditions and Cultural Rituals

The Islamic ritual and traditions propagate equal gender representation and ensure that women are empowered to participate freely. Contrastingly, opportunities for empowerment in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) are out of bounds for most women due to the cultural values and practices that value the male dominion. As an illustration, the purdah tradition preventing relations between a woman and other men, her family members excepted and enforcing covering herself up in public is the example of the traditional practice in question. Some tribes of KP have adopted this habit, particularly of all tribes which were earlier part of Federally Administered Tribal Areas may find it hard to participate in religious rituals and customs.⁶

Role of Women

Women in the former Fata community are also full family members and therefore they do almost all the duties in the household. They have been entrusted with the role of preserving customs and keeping the endowments of the region's cultural legacy alive.

Marriage Practices

The most conservative parts of KP, the ex-Fata districts, continue to practice traditional marriage. However, they have mostly affected women. Practices such as compulsory marriage, underage marriages, pre-arranged weddings greatly restrict women's autonomy as such they are not able to assert their rights and make independent decisions on their own.

Marriage and Weddings

In the former Fata region, matrimonial rites are the most symbolic and these form an integral part of custom for families. These cultural fiestas that span over days are distinctive for their gregariousness in that they encompass some exhilarating activities including traditional dances feasting, donations and gifts.

Purdah System

There is the purdah system present in KP areas that had been ex-FATA areas; the purdah system encourages women to stay in isolation and cover their faces. This gait yields the effect of few women movements and engagement in

the public sphere, which consequently leaves in their wake minimal access to education jobs and even calls for social interaction.

Honor Culture

In the ex-FATA regions of KP, there exists a culture of honor which extends to the families of women. When women's choices and behavior are controlled in this way, it may result in severe restrictions on their education, job prospects, and personal autonomy.

Gender Roles

The culture of the ex-FATA areas is also centered on traditional gender roles. The women are given household chores and entrusted with child-rearing, whereas the men are decision makers as well as providers for the family. These responsibilities related to gender limit women's opportunities for professional, scholastic, and individual growth.⁷ It is stated in the Holy Quran that "O humanity! Indeed, we created you from a male and a female, and made you into peoples and tribes so that you may 'get to' know one another. Surely the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous among you. Allah is truly All-Knowing, All-Aware".⁸

Gender Segregation

The Ex-Fata areas regrettably still have widespread gender discrimination. Men and women are still regrettably separated at events and gatherings in public spaces. This practice is common at faculties, where instruction for men and women is often separated. Doing away with such boundaries is important if we are to growth equality and inclusion.

Festivals and Celebrations

Festivals and festivities were always present due to the Ex-Fata's rich traditional heritage. Indigenous people look forward to these celebrations in particular, which are often marked by lively indigenous music, vigorous dancing, and profound religious rites. What distinguishes these festivals is the vibrant traditional attire worn by the ladies who participate enthusiastically in the festivities. These added pleasures and opportunities for connection make those experiences obviously remember.

Religious Observances

Another essential component of the people from the Ex-Fata territories has always been religion. Women engage in religious gatherings, fast during the

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month of Ramadan, and offer daily prayers. They could also go to nearby shrines to seek spiritual direction.

Challenges and Opportunities

Those problems are typically worsened by cultural and conventional beliefs that emphasize male involvement and restrict women's independence. These challenges which can be frequently primarily based on cultural and traditional practices that are inconsistent with the lessons of Islam.⁹

Although these cultural rites and practices present an enormous challenge for women in the ex- FATA areas of KP, there are several routes for change and empowerment. Cultural practices are challenged through various attempts to create awareness, educate people, and advocate for women's rights.¹⁰

These challenges include:

- Education and employment opportunities
- High domestic violence and sexual assault
- Lack of health care and reproductive rights

Women had Difficulties

Social Challenges

Lacking healthcare and education for women

Boundaries on movement and mobility of Women

Ferocity and prejudice against women

Economic Challenges

Loss of Economic opportunities and Jobs for women

Deficiency of financial opportunities

Irregular pay and gender pay gaps

Political Challenges

Demotion and under-representation in policy formulation.

Small levels of community and public involvement

No legal protection and enforcement for women rights.¹¹

Policies and Government Initiatives

Women Empowerment

- Various women empowerment programs are introduced by the government in ex-FATA areas of KP.

- The programs aim at educating and training women on skills and offering them economic opportunities.¹²

Gender Equality

- The government is committed to promoting gender equality in the ex-FATA areas of KP.
- Policies have been implemented to ensure equal access to education, healthcare, and employment for women.¹³

Health Services

- The government has focused on improving healthcare services for women in the ex-FATA areas of KP.
- Initiatives include the establishment of women's health centres and the provision of reproductive healthcare services.¹⁴

Violence against Women

- The government has implemented strict laws and policies to address violence against women in the ex-FATA areas of KP.
- Initiatives include the establishment of women's protection centres and the provision of legal support for survivors.

Call to Action

Suggestions for women-related issues at ex-FATA areas in reference to their rights and empowerment struggle.

Engaging with the community organizations and local leadership in order to facilitate and strengthen them to initiate and implement programs related to women's empowerment in the area.

"So, providing them quality education, health care, and opening other opportunities will thus break the vicious circle of poverty and enable them to lead a life full of opportunities."

We need to rise up and act in earnest to help the women of the former FATA areas carve their future way towards prosperity.

Conclusion

Numerous challenges confront women in the ex-FATA areas of KP which include; lack of education, healthcare and economic activities. In addition, women's rights and freedoms in this region are restricted by traditional cultural practices and patriarchal norms. However, amidst these problems, ladies from the former FATA have fought on valiantly for better lives.

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Therefore, it is important to ensure that they are given resources and support with which they can empower themselves so as to overcome such obstacles.

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