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## An Exploration of Gendered Power Dynamics within Tribal Structures: A Case Study of South Waziristan

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### ABSTRACT

*This research explores gendered power relations in tribal formations in South Waziristan, a territory with entrenched patriarchal conventions and cultural values. In the face of worldwide trends towards equality between genders, tribal communities such as the one in South Waziristan continue to be relatively conservative. Traditional hierarchies of power within tribal codes influence and confine women's roles and deny them agency in social, political, and economic life. This study uses qualitative approaches, such as interviews with indigenous residents and textual analysis of tribal norms (Pashtunwali), to explore how these systems perpetuate male supremacy and exclude women. The results demonstrate the integration of tradition, religion, and cultural identity in perpetuating gender inequalities. Recommendations stress the need for participatory policies, education, and community participation for slowly altering rooted gender dynamics.*

**Keywords:** Gender, Tribal Organization, South Waziristan, Pashtunwali, Patriarchy, Women, Power Relations.

### Introduction

Gender and power are inherently tied together, particularly in the context of tribal societies where traditional systems determine individual roles and social standing. In Pakistan's tribal belt, including South Waziristan, gender roles are not only culturally constructed but actively enforced through a multifaceted web of customary laws, religious interpretations, and social norms. Through this study, it examines how gendered power functions in the context of tribal settings within South Waziristan, with a specific emphasis on how these dynamics push women to the margins.

In patriarchal tribal societies, authority is largely held by men, and women's lives are usually restricted to the domestic sphere. The aim of this research is to examine the continuity of these power arrangements and evaluate their consequences for gender equality based on qualitative field data and sociocultural theories.

The intersection of power and gender is a compelling aspect of understanding the social dynamics of tribal societies. Nowhere is this more evident than in South Waziristan, a territory within Pakistan's erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), where power hierarchies are deeply entrenched in patriarchal traditions and tribal codes. Gendered power in such contexts is not just about social roles but an embedded structure of inequality upheld by cultural norms, religious beliefs, and customary law. This research will examine how such gendered power relations are made, maintained, and contested within the tribal institutions of South Waziristan.

Tribal societies historically everywhere have been influenced by strict patriarchal institutions, and South Waziristan is no different. Social organization in this area is based on male authority figures, with descent and inheritance following patrilineal lines and communal decisions usually taken by jirgas (tribal councils) or male elders. Women are systematically excluded within this system, both politically and socially, leading to limited access to education, healthcare, and justice (Ahmad, 2020; Khan, 2019). The power dynamics in South Waziristan are gendered because they are based on customary norms like Pashtunwali, an internal code of practice that prioritizes honor, hospitality, and male dominance. Based on this code, women are seen mainly as carriers of family honor, and their free movement and autonomy are highly controlled (Ali, 2018).

Modern scholarship on gender and power tends to draw on feminist theory and postcolonial critique in order to account for such imbalances. Feminist theorists such as Sylvia Walby (1990) contend that patriarchy exists in the public and private spheres alike, perpetuating male domination by institutions such as the family, religion, and state. In tribal societies such as South Waziristan, such patriarchal institutions are reinforced by traditional customs and socio-religious interpretations that naturalize the subordinate status of women. Whereas religion contributes extensively to the construction of gender norms, its interpretations are themselves mediated through pre-Islamic tribal traditions but practiced under the cover of Islam (Zia, 2021). A fusion socio-religious system follows in which male domination gets sacralized and gender inequality institutionalized.

Irrespective of the tenacity of patriarchal norms, tribal societies are in no sense static. They remain engaged with contemporary legal, political, and economic regimes, particularly since the consolidation of FATA into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in 2018.

This consolidation was directed towards eliminating colonial legal regimes, like the Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR), and subjecting tribal regions to Pakistan's national legal system. Legal reforms have yet to automatically translate to transformations in gender relations, though. South Waziristan women also continue to experience high-level structural barriers in the form of low-level involvement in public life, non-representation in the local government, and recurrent exposure to gender violence (Human Rights Watch, 2020).

Sociologically, Pierre Bourdieu's (2001) symbolic violence theory is of great utility in the study of gendered power in South Waziristan. Symbolic violence is used to describe the incorporation of master ideologies by oppressors, where women can internalize and legitimate their own subordination. In most tribal societies, women are themselves defenders of traditional values and socialize their daughters into similar positions which they themselves held. This circular reinforcement of gendered norms guarantees the repetition of patriarchal power without the explicit application of coercion. Thus, initiatives to empower women have to contend with not just external systems of control but also internalized dogma and cultural rationalities that support gender inequalities (Bourdieu, 2001; Kandiyoti, 1988).

The exclusion of women in tribal societies is not merely a matter of culture but overlaps with socioeconomic and political factors. Education, for example, is a key location where gender disparity is reproduced. Female literacy levels in South Waziristan are still one of the lowest in the country, partly because of security issues but also as a result of entrenched cultural taboos against girls' education, as reported by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (2021). The same patterns can be seen in health services access, where gender norms and poor infrastructure join to limit women's mobility and use of healthcare (UNDP, 2022). These structural inequalities are supported by the

lack of legal protection mechanisms and a lack of female representation in the local level governance structures.

Additionally, one cannot ignore the place of conflict and militarization within this area. Insurgency and military interventions spanning many decades have altered the political and social landscape of South Waziristan. While such changes have upended traditional power structures, they have also brought with them new violence and mechanisms of control that negatively impact women disproportionately. Displacement, poverty, and the militarization of daily life have added to women's exposure, with fewer resources and even less agency than previously (Ahmed, 2017). Gendered power in these contexts is not only a question of tradition but is actively reproduced by state policies, development agendas, and security practices.

However, even within these limiting spaces, resistance and agency continue to exist. Women of South Waziristan have been asserting their rights quietly but consistently, and usually in informal, culturally permissible terms. Some have become teachers, health workers, or local activists, refuting the perception of tribal women as passive victims of patriarchy. These acts of resistance, while small-scale, are very significant in grasping the nuance of gendered power. They emphasize the imperatives for a thoughtful approach to understanding both the limitations and potential in tribal societies (Kabeer, 1999).

This research employs a qualitative approach to investigate the lived lives of women in South Waziristan and how gendered power is exercised and challenged. Through carrying out in-depth interviews, focus group discussion, and participant observation, this research endeavors to discover the voices of those silenced in academic and policy circles. It also seeks to examine the socio-cultural, legal, and economic aspects that perpetuate or contest gender inequalities in tribal formations. Theoretical perspectives from feminist anthropology, postcolonial thought, and critical sociology will inform the analytical approach.

This research significance lies in that it adds to both the scholarly debates and policy interventions. The majority of the literature about gender in Pakistan focuses in urban or semi-urban context. The majority of the research conducted in tribal areas is under-researched and poorly understood. This study puts at the center of its narratives South Waziristan women, thereby bridging an important gap in academic knowledge while making it inform development practitioners, policymakers, and civil society actors working towards gender justice in marginalized regions.

In summary, examining gendered power in South Waziristan calls for an interdisciplinary and intersectional approach—one that considers the historical legacies, cultural customs, religious accounts, and political economies that condition everyday life. This research attempts to offer such an account, providing both critical analysis and practical guidance toward changing gender relations in tribal formations. In challenging the roots of patriarchy and bringing to the surface new forms of resistance, it aims to add its voice to a more equitable and just world for everyone.

### **Background**

South Waziristan is a rugged and inaccessible area of Pakistan's northwestern border, the frontier with Afghanistan. It was one of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) until the 2018 constitutional reforms brought FATA under the control of the province of

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Traditionally ruled by the colonial-era Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR), the area existed in legal exclusion from the rest of Pakistan, with weak state presence and very little exposure to modern legal frameworks (Khan, 2019; Ahmed, 2013). Not only did this legal

framework facilitate collective punishment, but it also promoted a socio-political regime where customary norms remained above constitutional safeguards.

Underpinning the social makeup of South Waziristan is the Pashtunwali code—an uncoded system of rules governing honor (nang), revenge (badal), hospitality (melmastia), and loyalty (wafa) (Tair & Edwards, 2006). Although idealized for upholding integrity and courage, Pashtunwali underlines patriarchal gender roles that reward male supremacy and subjugate women. Masculinity here is directly linked with leadership, protection, and authority, while femininity is characterized by humility, obedience, and seclusion (Ali & Zeb, 2021). Women are treated as guardians of the family and tribal honor, and their conduct, movement, education, and engagement in public life are stringently regulated to maintain this collective honor (Yousaf, 2017). The classical system of governance by the jirga a male council of elders remains preeminent in conflict resolution and in political decision-making in South Waziristan. Women remain systematically excluded from these forums, perpetuating structural gender discrimination. Despite the FATA-KP merger, jirgas persist in most regions with substantial sway, particularly where state institutions are inoperative or weak (International Crisis Group, 2018). These institutions not only deny women a voice but also impose punishments that are frequently incompatible with contemporary legal standards and human rights.

Access to education by women in South Waziristan is one of the lowest in Pakistan. Female literacy in the area is currently below 10%, primarily because of cultural restrictions, unavailability of girls' schools, insecurity, and unavailability of female teachers (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2022). The girls are normally withdrawn from school at puberty and higher education for women is essentially non-existent. Early marriages are common and are often arranged through customary practices such as swara, where girls are married off in reparation to solve tribal disagreements reducing their autonomy and future possibilities even further (Ali & Zeb, 2021).

Access to healthcare is also critical. Women are severely hindered from accessing reproductive and maternal healthcare because of mobility limitations, the lack of female healthcare workers, and pervasive social stigmas around the health of women. The maternal mortality rate is incredibly high, and cultural stigma too often discourages women from accessing timely medical care (Amnesty International, 2020).

The socio-political situation was also complicated by post-9/11 events, especially the emergence of militancy in the tribal belt. South Waziristan emerged as a hotbed for such militant outfits as the Taliban, and consequently, military actions such as Operation Rah-e-Nijat (Yousaf, 2017) ensued. These conflicts resulted in large-scale displacement and destruction and impacted both infrastructure and livelihood. Whereas increased militancy further limited the freedom of women, displacement brought some women into contact with urban life and humanitarian aid services for the very first time. Through IDP camps, women received education, medical care, and awareness campaigns, thereby receiving limited exposure to other gender roles and rights discourses (Rehman, 2020).

The 2018 consolidation of FATA into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was regarded as a momentous move toward legal and social integration. The abolition of the FCR and the extension of constitutional rights to the area were anticipated to demolish patriarchal legal frameworks and create opportunities for women's empowerment (Khan, 2019; Rehman, 2020). Nevertheless, transition has remained tardy and contentious. Local opposition to reforms, poor institutional capacity, and

the persistence of conventional systems of governance have constrained the change-making potential of the merger (International Crisis Group, 2018).

Regardless of these limitations, a new trend can be seen. Educated women, many who have studied abroad from the region, are coming back to South Waziristan and are involved in local development as teachers, health workers, and social activists. Nongovernmental organizations have also established skill-upgrading centers, informal schooling, and awareness campaigns targeting women, and offering them safe spaces for limited empowerment (Ali & Zeb, 2021). These small-scale initiatives are slowly undermining the existing gender narratives. Social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook are also contributing to the challenge of dominant gender narratives by facilitating the exchange of empowering content and stories and thus shaping the younger generations.

Despite this, various barriers continue to exist. Honor violence, in the form of threats and social exclusion, intimidates many women against entering into public lives or claiming their rights (Amnesty International, 2020). The lack of women's political representation, even during the post-merger period when women's quotas are in place, demonstrates the extent of resistance in society to gender inclusion. In South Waziristan, it is slow and contentious cultural change, and attempts to empower women will need to contend with a deeply patriarchal environment reinforced through history, religion, and tradition.

In conclusion, the history of South Waziristan offers a distinct convergence of geography, history, culture, and conflict that influences deeply ingrained gendered power relations. Change is a possibility, albeit one that must be based on a complete comprehension of tribal formations and reinforced with sustained, culturally informed interventions balancing respect for indigenous identities with the universal endeavors of gender equality and justice.

### **Literature review**

Gendered power relations inherent in tribal cultures, most notably in South Waziristan, continue to represent a highly under-researched topic of analysis, even though they have significant implications for social justice, women's rights, and development. The intersection of gender, power, and tribal tradition gives rise to a distinctive socio-political system where women's roles are tightly defined, controlled, and often circumscribed. In South Waziristan, a tribal area in northwestern Pakistan, social organization is defined primarily by time-honored traditions such as Pashtunwali, patriarchal state structures such as Jirga, and deeply embedded socio-religious values. These organizations not only define everyday gender practices but also operate systematically to repress female autonomy and decision-making.

The following literature review traces these dynamics through the prism of modern gender theory and tribal ethnography. Drawing on theorists like Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and R.W. Connell, as well as regional scholars and anthropologists, this review deconstructs the way power is built, sustained, and subverted within the tribal context of South Waziristan. It examines how gender roles are staged and enforced, how traditional systems perpetuate male supremacy, and how new actors including NGOs, education, and online activism are quietly transforming these dynamics.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Power is not a fixed force that exists solely in formal institution it is dynamic, relational, and often hidden within the textures of everyday life. Foucault's (1978) understanding of power represents a turning point away from traditional top-down models towards more diffused forms. Foucault, in *The History of Sexuality*, argues that power works through discourses, social norms, and

institutions and by penetrating intimate relationships, it forms bodies and identities. In the tribal societies of South Waziristan, power is not only evident in physical or legal control but also in cultural practices that control women's conduct, movement, and visibility.

Judith Butler (1990) develops the argument further by adding the concept of gender performativity. In *Gender Trouble*, she contends that gender is not a biological feature but a series of repeated acts conforming to societal norms. These acts are ingrained in the cultural scripts that are frequently established through rituals, customs, and punishment for not following them. In tribal areas, these performances are forced and institutionalized. Women's compliance with dress codes, household roles, and restricted mobility are illustrations of how these performances are not only anticipated but enforced socially and occasionally violently.

Connell's (2005) hegemonic masculinity provides a further insight into tribal patriarchy. Tribal culture in South Waziristan foregrounds male honor, courage, and authority. These are framed as symbols of power that legitimize male dominance over women and weaker men. Institutions such as the Jirga, religious instruction, and communal ritual assist in social reproducing these characteristics to the exclusion of other masculinities and women's voices.

Together, these theories shed light on how gendered power in South Waziristan functions not just through formal rules but through subtle, mundane practices that are accepted as natural. Knowing these frameworks enables us to read tribal gender structures not as discrete oddities but as part of larger mechanisms of social control.

#### **Pashtunwali and Gender Norms**

Pashtunwali the Pashtun's racial code that commands their lives is at the heart of the regulation of gender in South Waziristan. It is comprised of principles such as nang (honor), badal (revenge), melmastia (hospitality), and nanawati (forgiveness). While popularly portrayed as an idealized code, Pashtunwali creates strict parameters for what is acceptable behavior, particularly for women. Women are regarded as custodians of family honor, and any misconduct on their part is taken to be a blemish on the group honor of the family or tribe (Ahmed, 1980).

Ahmed's (1980) ethnographic work among the Mohmand tribe sheds light on the ways in which Pashtunwali imposes gender roles. Women's honor is zealously protected, and their movements are also supervised closely. Their sphere of work is mostly restricted to the domestic realm, and their public appearance is deemed threatening to tribal stability. The imposition of purdah (seclusion) is not just a religious practice but a cultural norm that is rooted in the values of Pashtunwali.

Barth (1959) also identifies that Pashtunwali institutionalizes gender segregation in the form of spatial organization, governing women's access to education, employment, and healthcare. The cultural script requires modesty, compliance, and invisibility from women. Departure from this can lead to honor killings, forced marriages, or exclusion. Pashtunwali therefore not only governs behavior but does so by internalizing its logic within the very identity of the tribal members.

Khan (2017) contends that Pashtunwali is selectively read by male elites to maintain power. Female resistance or autonomy is seen as threatening this order and therefore delegitimized. Reinterpretations of Pashtunwali along gender-equal lines are resisted, as shown by how deeply a code it is embedded in sustaining gender hierarchies.

#### **Patriarchy and the Jirga System**

The Jirga system tribal councils comprised of men only is among the most obvious display of patriarchy in tribal life. The councils determine conflicts from land disputes to marriage and

murder cases. They also serve as judicial and political powers. But the Jirga is not only a law enforcement institution; it is a cultural tradition that systematically denies women a voice in decision-making and reinforces men's control (Khan, 2007).

Studies by Shah (2014) reveal that state dependence on Jirgas, particularly in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), has institutionalized gender discrimination. Women do not attend these councils and their views are not taken into consideration. Legal rulings, which typically concern women, are made by male elderly leaders, and results tend to favor male kin or community leaders.

Instances of swara (giving females as a dowry for male offenses) or compulsory marriages demonstrate how the Jirga system utilizes women's bodies as instruments of tribal justice. Women hardly ever have the right to appeal or contest such rulings. Even if legal reforms are put in place by the state, they are hardly effective because of the parallel power of the Jirga.

Efforts to establish gender-inclusive Jirgas or advisory councils have been only partially successful. NGOs have encouraged "women's Jirgas" in some regions, but they are weak and more ceremonial in nature. The deeper tribal culture, based on male domination and suspicion of feminine initiative, precludes effective inclusion.

### **Education, Mobility, and Structural Exclusion**

Physical mobility and education are the most important indicators of female empowerment. Both are extremely limited for women in South Waziristan by virtue of cultural, religious, and security-based taboos. Female literacy levels in some areas of the region are reported to be less than 10% by Ali (2014). Cultural taboo discourages girls from going to school, followed by lack of infrastructure, women teachers, and safe learning environments further limiting access.

During the Taliban insurgency, numerous girls' schools were bombed or closed and female teachers were threatened (Human Rights Watch, 2018). Even after schools reopened, family pressure deterred enrollment. Families avoided harassment or social shame as they believed educated women would go against gender roles and challenge male authority.

Bano (2012) discovered that opposition to girls' education is routinely argued in terms of moral deterioration. Educated women are said by elders to be less submissive, more self-sufficient, and to "ruin" household structures. Thus, education is perceived not as a right but a danger to social order.

Mobility too is strictly policed. Under the purdah system, women are required to stay indoors or be accompanied by male escorts. They are denied or restricted from access to healthcare, legal aid, and employment. These are not merely practical but embedded in social mores seeing public women as sinful or defiant.

Despite all this, conditional cash transfers and community mobilization have made some impact. The Benazir Income Support Programme and UNICEF's education Interventions have led to more enrollment. However, these are piecemeal efforts and cannot shift ingrained attitudes.

### **Resistance, Resilience and Agency**

In spite of institutionalized oppression, South Waziristan women are not silent sufferers.

They use different forms of resistance ranging from passive defiance to active activism. Scott (1990) has termed such practices as "everyday resistance" subtle and non-confrontational acts of resistance from within that challenge the dominant power structures.

Akbar (2020) emphasizes how women utilize storytelling, poetry, and domestic pedagogy to maintain cultural memory and counter patriarchal narratives. These actions not only help maintain

female agency but provide counter-narratives to the world to new generations. Women, for instance, tell individual stories of injustice in secret meetings and so produce a shared awareness that defies silence.

Social media has also become a means of resistance. Khan and Qadeer (2021) observe that tribal women increasingly use social media to report abuse, vent opinions, and mobilize support networks. This type of activism circumvents conventional gatekeepers and generates virtual arenas for solidarity.

Women's NGOs such as Khwendo Kor and Aurat Foundation have also played a key role. These NGOs offer literacy, vocational skills training, and legal advice. They bargain with tribal leaders, providing services while being sensitive to local mores. Their impact is small but their presence is indicative of a gradual but steady counterpressure against entrenched patriarchy.

Yet, activism is not without danger. Activist women are threatened, socially ostracized, or even physically harmed. The state's reaction is still ambivalent encyclical in words but short in protection and money. But these acts of resistance represent fissures in otherwise iron-clad tribal patriarchy.

The gendered power dynamics literature in South Waziristan portrays a multifaceted interplay between tradition, power, and resistance. Structures like Pashtunwali and the Jirga system institutionalize patriarchy and constrain female agency. Despite this, women still resist through cultural expression, education, and activism. Foucault's power theory, Butler's performativity, and Connell's hegemonic masculinity provide essential frameworks to comprehend these dynamics. Combined, they attest that power is not only hierarchical but also reproduced within the daily norms and behaviors. The resistance occurring within this system albeit weak, is profound.

More research needs to investigate the ways in which generational shifts, access to technology, and state policy can redefine tribal Pakistani gender relations. South Waziristan's case is not only a South Asian problem but part of an international struggle for gender justice across culturally dynamic systems.

### **Research Questions**

1. How do tribal systems within South Waziristan reinforce and legitimize hierarchies of gendered power?
2. What are the modes of power wielded over women in South Waziristan, and how are these a part of day-to-day tribal practices?
3. How do cultural scripts such as Pashtunwali influence gender roles and perpetuate patriarchal authority within tribal society?
4. How do institutional arrangements such as the Jirga and traditional laws bar women from political and legal engagement?
5. What are the new forms of women's resistance and negotiation within the gendered tribal power dynamics of South Waziristan?

### **Research Methodology**

#### **1. Research Design**

A qualitative ethnographic method was used to attain in-depth understanding of the gendered power structures of South Waziristan. The method centered on narration, community practices, and insider interpretations.

#### **2. Data Collection**



**Interviews:** Carried out 20 semi-structured interviews (10 women, 10 men) in various villages of Wana and nearby areas.

**Focus Groups:** Two focus group discussions with local women activists and teachers.

**Document Analysis:** Read tribal codes, jirga judgments, NGO reports, and government documents after FATA merger.

### **3. Sampling**

Purposive sampling for selecting participants with knowledge regarding tribal systems and gender roles. Participants were elders, religious scholars, local women, NGO personnel, and teachers.

### **4. Ethical Considerations**

Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained. Verbal informed consent was applied.

Research followed guidelines in working with vulnerable groups.

### **5. Data Analysis**

Thematic analysis was employed. NVivo software was utilized to code transcripts, and themes were inductively derived.

## **Findings**

### **1. Codification of Gender Roles**

Men and women had well-defined gender roles which were clearly enunciated. Men perceived themselves as providers and guardians, while women recognized themselves with domestic responsibilities and caregiving. Most women internalized the norms.

### **2. Jirga and Male Authority**

All male respondents accepted the jirga as valid and essential. Women indicated being indirectly affected by jirga decisions but lacked any forum of appeal or input.

### **3. Women's Perception of Power**

Most women reported feelings of helplessness but exercised agency in domestic domains education of children, running the household economy, and emotional work.

### **4. Conflict and Displacement Impacts**

The military campaigns and displacement (2009–2015) broke tribal cohesion. For some, this created new opportunities such as education and NGO participation but for others, there was increased insecurity.

### **5. New Resistance and Resilience**

Women were also practicing informal activism conducting education circles, health awareness sessions, and community farming. Certain men, especially younger ones, also advocated gender inclusion, indicating incremental change.

## **Recommendations**

### **Community-Based Gender Awareness Programs**

Support localized awareness campaigns through cultural and religious references towards acceptance of gender equality.

### **Legal Reforms and Female Representation**

Support formal legal systems' implementation over jirgas. Enforce female representation in local governments.

### **Safe Educational Spaces for Girls**

Invest in female-led schools for girls. Ensure safe transportation and mechanisms of community protection.

### **Support for Female-Led Initiatives**

Finance and support women's cooperatives, home industries, and grass-root NGOs.

### **Male Engagement**

Engage men particularly religious leaders and youth in gender sensitization workshops in order to create allies for change.

### **Conclusion**

The examination of gendered power relations within the tribal order of South Waziristan demonstrates a sophisticated and entrenched system of social hierarchy where power is predominantly held in men's hands. Long-standing cultural practices like Pashtunwali, religious readings, socio-political exclusion, and lack of institutional representation of women reinforce this concentration of power. In such tribal contexts, gender roles are not merely constructed culturally but are rigidly imposed by customary practices such as the jirga, which systematically exclude women from decision-making.

In spite of these deeply rooted structures, the study reveals that women are not completely without agency. A number of women in South Waziristan practice subtle forms of resistance and agency, especially within the private domain through child education, control over household economies, health-related decision-making, and the development of informal support networks. These manifestations of agency, though limited, test a type of resilience that has always been neglected in scholarly and policy discourses on tribal women.

In addition, the research shows that although traditional gender roles are still pervasive, they are not completely resistant to change. FATA's annexation into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, growing exposure to education, the role of NGOs, and technological penetration (mobile phones, social media) are slowly translating into changes in attitudes in society, particularly among the young. Certain men especially the educated youth hold more permissive attitudes regarding the role of women, suggesting the possibility of generational change.

But change in gendered power dynamics can only be brought about with the help of top-down processes or external models to a limited extent. Change needs to be inclusive and meaningful, which is only possible by understanding the tribal and cultural dynamics on the ground. Interventions must be based on the realities of South Waziristan's people, honoring their cultures but at the same time pushing for human rights, equality, and justice. Methods that engage community elders, religious leaders, women, and youth in discussion and awareness programs are crucial to ensuring slow but significant developments.

Legal reforms should be followed by educational programs, economic empowerment, and psychological liberation to break patriarchal beliefs. Notably, institutional structures should be developed to ensure women's representation in government, legal systems, and peacebuilding platforms.

Finally, the power dynamics of gender in South Waziristan are part of a larger battle between tradition and change. Although the obstacles are considerable, the seeds of change have already been sown through the bravery and strength of the women of this region and their supporters. By embracing a culturally aware, inclusive, and locally based methodology, there is a potential to disrupt and ultimately alter the system of inequalities that has long ruled tribal gender relations.

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