

FEDERALLY ADMINISTERED TRIBAL AREAS (FATA): FROM NO-MAN'S LAND TO POLITICAL MAINSTREAMING

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Abstract

The Federally Administered Tribal Areas (Fata) was a 'no man' zone for political activities and freedom of thought and expression thus resultantly making it a real threat for the country's survival and security. Since long, the people of Fata have been deprived of basic human rights and other socio-economic opportunities existing in the rest of Pakistan. As a consequence of lingering problem and seclusion from the State and mainstream politics Fata remained a governance nightmare, where instability and lawlessness is rampant. The current system of governance, the Frontier Crimes Regulations (FCR) that governed the area, was introduced by the British rulers for their own colonial aims in the region. The same system remained and continued even after the reassignment of the area from British majestic administration to Pakistan. Under the Constitution of Pakistan, the President is the only authority to enact laws for Fata. In mid-2011 President Asif Ali Zardari issued two orders regarding Amendments in the FCR and Extension of the Political Parties Order to Fata, planning to endorse administrative, judicial and political reforms in the tribal areas of Pakistan. The prolonged lack of political activities along with other issues makes any development and reforms agenda in the area (Fata) both unique and challenging.

Key Words: *fata, fcr, political reforms, political parties, election.*

Introduction

The Federally Administered Tribal Areas (Fata) has a very important geo-strategic position, where it shares borders with Afghanistan and the settled areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). Fata consists of seven agencies and six Frontier Regions (FRs). Seven agencies include Bajaur, Mohmand, Khyber, Orakzai, Kurram, North

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Waziristan, and South Waziristan. While regions are: Peshawar, Kohat, Bannu, Lakki Marwat, Tank, and Dera Ismail Khan. Estimated population of Fata is 3.5 million.¹

Currently, Fata is the most volatile region of Pakistan. American President Bill Clinton has phrased the area as the 'most dangerous place on earth'.² Tribal belt of Pakistan is known for its unique structure of governance that have prevalent since centuries. The current administrative system of governance was established by the British rulers for their vested interests on the gateway to South Asia from the North West of India.

To make certain their control over the area, the colonial rulers enforced a series of laws in 1870s. One of these laws was the Frontier Crimes Regulations (FCR). The FCR, especially designed for the tribal areas, was different from the criminal and civil laws that were in force elsewhere in British India. In 1893, the British government elevated a demarcation with Afghanistan, called by Durand Line. In 1901, the British rule issued a new FCR that expanded the scope of earlier regulations and awarded wide powers to administrative officials (*Maliks*— tribal elders).³

The British administration deeply relied upon the local support. For this purpose various steps were taken to gain the sympathies of the tribal people. In this regard certain reforms were introduced including Maliki system and FCR. The people of Fata were deprived of political, judicial, social and other reforms, introduced in other parts of the country. The well-established excuse for this denial was the traditional set up and conservativenature of the people.

The same situation continued even after the withdrawal of British colonial administration from the Indian subcontinent. Pakistan exactly followed the same system of administration inherited from the British. Unfortunately, this system more or less is even continuing today. The mechanism of accession, signed in 1948, contracted the tribal areas a special administrative status. The tribal areas were allowed to preserve their semi-autonomous status,

¹ Sarfraz Khan, "Special Status of FATA: Illegal Becoming Licit", *Research Journal of Area Study Centre*, University of Peshawar, 2009, p.2. As well <[http://www.asc-centralasia.edu.pk/ Issue_63/02-SPECIAL_STATUS_OF_FATA.html](http://www.asc-centralasia.edu.pk/Issue_63/02-SPECIAL_STATUS_OF_FATA.html)>, accessed December 15, 2013.

² Syed Waqar Ali Shah, "Political Reforms in Fata: Will It End the Current Militancy", Heidelberg Paper in South Asian and Comparative Politics, *Working Paper No. 64*, 2012.p.7.

³ Ibid.

exercising administrative authority based on tribal codes and traditional institutions like Jirga. This exclusive system even falls into place in Pakistan's Constitution of 1973. Political parties have had a *de facto* presence in the region since the 1970s. Some political factions even managed to get their candidates elected to the National Assembly and the Senate of Pakistan. But they could not take part in elections as representatives of Pakistan's political parties and were considered to be independent candidates.

Under the Constitution of 1973, the President of Pakistan is the only authority to enact laws for Fata. In mid-2011 President Asif Ali Zardari issued two orders regarding Amendments in the FCR and Extension of the Political Parties Order to Fata, with an aim to endorse administrative, judicial and political reforms in the tribal areas of Pakistan.⁴ In the course of these reforms, certain amendments have been made in the FCR. Keeping in view the prolonged lack of political activities along with other issues, any development and reforms agenda in the area (Fata) is both unique and challenging.

This paper is an attempt to examine the 2013 general election in Pakistan and the emerging new trends in the country, in general, and in the tribal areas of Pakistan, in particular. It is an attempt to address some major questions which surfaced in the wake of fast deteriorating law and order situation in the country, and especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Fata. These questions are: How the inhabitant of Fata viewed the election? What was Taliban's reaction to the election? How people responded to the threats of Taliban? Which major political parties participated in the election? What political reforms were introduced and how did it work for stimulating political activities in Fata? What was the voters' turnout? Why religious parties lost their influence in tribal areas? What major new trends were observed in Fata in 2013 election?

State Indifference towards Fata

Since long, the people of Fata have been deprived of basic human rights and other socio-economic opportunities existing in the rest of Pakistan. As a consequence of lingering overlook and seclusion from the state, intense poverty, instability and lawlessness define Fata.

⁴ "Major Changes Made in FCR: Fata People Get Political Rights", *Dawn*, (Islamabad), August 13, 2011.

Due to the absence of proper governmental setup and weak state writ, Fata has become a sort of safe haven for hostile groups and individuals who have successfully taken advantage of prevailing circumstances i.e. poverty, illiteracy, state neglect and institutional isolation. They have cashed in on these weak points of the area to gain local support and ultimately established a state within a state.

The partition plan of June 3, 1947 resulted into the creation of Pakistan on 14th of August 1947. In many parts of the Indian subcontinent, referendums and plebiscites were held in order to allow the masses to choose their future either as part of India or Pakistan. In this regard the inclusion of NWFP (recently renamed as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) and Fata in Pakistan was one of the most cumbersome problems.⁵

Although some local leaders at that time had raised the issue of Pakhtunistan and were striving for an independent Pakhtun state, yet their efforts remained unsuccessful, as the British simply rejected the idea. A greater part of the masses tended towards the Muslim League and joined their efforts for creating a separate homeland for the Muslims. As far as association with Pakistan is concerned, a *Grand Jirga* was held in tribal agencies in 1947 in which all the tribes unanimously confirmed their support in favour of Pakistan. All the tribes declared and confirmed in written statements their loyalties towards Pakistan, and in return asked to maintain the same relations with central government of Pakistan as they had with the British.⁶

Though the tribal people were given the same status as they were enjoying in the British rule, the federal government of Pakistan could not remain unconcerned about the sense of seclusion of tribal areas for a long time. The first Governor General of Pakistan, Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, made a trip to the NWFP (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) in April 1948. During his visit he also managed to meet the tribal representatives and other elders. In his official address to the tribal representatives at the Governor House, Peshawar, he made it clear that "Pakistan has no desire to unduly interfere with your internal freedom. On the contrary, Pakistan

⁵ Dr Claude Rakisits, "Pakistan's Tribal Areas: A Critical No-Man's Land", (Paper delivered at Webster University Forum, Geneva), April 25, 2008, p.4. Available on <http://www.geopoliticalassessments.com/Pakistan_s_Tribal_Areas.pdf>, accessed January 22, 2013.

⁶ Sayed Wiqar, "Political Reforms in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan", p.7, available online at <http://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/volltextserver/13063/1/Heidelberg_Papers_64_Ali_Shah.pdf>, accessed January 19, 2013.

wants to help you and make you, as far as it lies in our power, self-reliant and self-sufficient and help in your educational, social and economic uplift, and not be left as you are dependent on annual doles, as has been the practice hitherto which meant that at the end of the year you were no better off than beggars asking for allowances, if possible a little more. We want to put you on your legs as self-respecting citizens who have the opportunities of fully developing and producing what is best in you and your land".⁷

After the death of Quaid-i-Azam, the federal government of Pakistan did nothing to change the policy towards the tribal areas and unfortunately the same inherited policies were continued to deal with the tribal people. The successive governments also ignored the situation and no basic changes were observed in their policies towards Fata. Like the British, the central government of Pakistan ruled the tribal people indirectly. In this indirect ruling system the political agents (PAs) were the main source of communication between the central government and the people of Tribal Areas. They gave allowances to the people through the political agents. They never contacted the people directly at the grassroots level.⁸

This situation remained unchanged and the indirect system of communication continued for a long. No initiatives were taken to introduce political, legislative or electoral reforms in Fata. The Political Parties Act of 1962 functioned in the rest of the country, whereas the Fata was denied of this right for reasons well known to the federal government of Pakistan. One reason of not allowing political activities in Fata might probably be the fear of popularity of the Pakhtun nationalist parties, it can be said, due to the demand of Pakhtun State at that time, which was un-acceptable to the federal government. These nationalist groups had the sympathies of Afghanistan government for their vested interests. Any miscalculation on the part of Pakistan could cause great damage to the national integrity and could result into serious security threats for the rest of the country.

Like their predecessor (British) Pakistan continued to deal with local tribal chiefs (maliks) through the political agents instead

⁷ Ibid., p.11.

⁸ Rashid Ahmed Khan, "Fata After Independence: 1947-2001" in Noorul Haq, Rashid Ahmed Khan, Maqsoodul Hasan Nuri (edt.), *Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan* (Islamabad, Islamabad Policy Research Institute, 2005), p.33.

of establishing contacts with the people at grassroots level.⁹ In short, Fata remained separate from the mainstream though it was a part of Pakistan. It resembled like a colony whose population lived under the shadow of old laws and other managerial arrangements that were quite different from the rest of administrative setup of Pakistan. The whole credit goes to the successive federal governments. They did not try to bring Fata region into the mainstream like the other parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan.

The people of Fata have joined Pakistan and affirmed the tribal areas as a part of Pakistan and have guaranteed to offer any help to the country if need arises. They have shown their loyalties and also made it clear “to be peaceful and law abiding and to maintain friendly relations with the people of the settled districts”.¹⁰ In return they got nothing but the old administrative setup which they have witnessed during British times. No fundamental changes are made in the policy of the government towards the administration and political structure of the tribal areas. They have continued with the old inherited colonial administration. The only system that governs the area is the FCR, which is cruel in nature. It is known as *Kala Qanon* (Black law) among the people of Fata.

Political Reforms in Fata

Since independence, the Fata has been dealt through special laws and regulations. The people of the area do not enjoy any political and other socio-economic rights as the other people do. The major reason at the back of this is the absence of a variety of legal arrangements necessary for the Fata inhabitants to use their basic rights as preserved in the Constitution of Pakistan. One of these legal arrangements, which have not been extended so far to the tribal areas, is the proper political setup in the area.

Keeping in view the miseries of the people and lawlessness prevailing in the area, the federal government has realized the fact that unless major changes are introduced in the Fata, it is difficult to eradicate militancy from the area and to govern it properly. For this purpose, some reforms have been introduced by the previous government of Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) in a hope to bring some positive changes in Fata. Though, previously, successive

⁹ Noor ul Haq, Rashid Ahmed Khan and Maqsudul Hasan Nuri, “Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan”, *IPRI Paper* 10, Asia Printers Islamabad, March 2005, p.25.

¹⁰ Ibid.

governments had introduced certain reforms in Fata, yet they were not properly implemented.

The adult franchise, which is a political right of every mature adult man and woman, has not been extended to Fata since independence. For about fifty years the people of Fata have been deprived of basic constitutional rights which are practiced in other parts of Pakistan. In late 1996 the federal government announced to extend the right of adult franchise to Fata. Till then the system of limited franchise was working in the Fata. In this system only the chosen people who were *Maliks* and other notables, had the right to cast their vote. Common local people had no such rights (the right to vote).¹¹

Until the introduction of adult franchise in 1996, an electoral college of some 35,500 *Maliks* selected representatives to the National Assembly, usually under the influence of some political stakeholders.¹² Thereafter, in the 1997, 2002 and 2008 polls, Fata legislators were directly elected to the lower house of Parliament of Pakistan. This legislative body from the agencies was purely elected on a non-party basis.¹³ The election of 1997 is considered the first of its type held in Fata in which 12 members were directly elected to the Parliament. People of Fata had been demanding introduction and proper functioning of adult franchise in their area for a long, but this right was denied to them by the successive governments due to some reasons mentioned earlier in this paper. In the Constitution of Pakistan Fata is considered as a federal subject, and due to this reason it has no representation in the provincial legislature. However, despite intense opposition from the *Maliks'* side and other paid proprietors, tribal people demanded that as Fata territory was part of Pakistan then why it was not considered as a part in real senses. They also demanded extension of all those privileges and other civil rights to Fata which existed in other parts of Pakistan.¹⁴

During President General Pervez Musharraf's regime some amendments were made in PPO (1962) and it was replaced as the PPO (2002), but again Fata region was specifically excluded from the jurisdiction of this act. In 2002, General Musharraf's government created a separate governor's secretariat for Fata.

¹¹ Sayed Wiqar, "Political Reforms," p.12.

¹² "FATA Political Reforms", <<http://waziristanhills.com/FATA/PoliticalReforms/tabid/135/language/en-GB/Default.aspx>>, accessed May 28, 2013.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Sayed Wiqar, "Political Reforms," p.12.

In 2006, it was reorganized as the Fata secretariat. But having limited resources and low capacity it was mostly dependent on its Khyber Pakhtunkhwa counterpart for proper functioning.

Another change was observed in Fata in 2002 general elections. These elections were held under the patronage of the military establishment in which the liberals were marginalized and the mullahs managed to win. In these elections, six-party religious coalition, the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), won seven of Fata's 12 National Assembly seats.¹⁵

The 2008 elections were somehow different from that of 2002 election. These general elections brought some positive change in Fata and one of them was representation of major political parties. Candidates affiliated to the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and Awami National Party (ANP) took part in the election and managed to win some seats in Fata. Unlike the past, religious parties manage to win only a single National Assembly seat.¹⁶

Subsequently, in 2009, the PPP government took initiatives and President Asif Ali Zardari pronounced some political and administrative reforms for Fata. These reforms also included freedom of political activities in the tribal areas of which this region was kept deprived for long. With the introduction of such reforms tribal people were now given the right to appeal during trial which they did not have previously. Similarly, those women and children who were under sixteen were exempted from the collective responsibility section of the FCR.¹⁷ Now the political parties were given freedom to operate freely in the tribal areas and carry out their political activities and present their party manifestos and other agendas. While introducing the PPO, the government aimed to offset the growing wave of militancy and to weaken the destructive movement of the militants of exploiting the simple headed people of Fata.¹⁸

These were the first-ever positive steps taken by the federal government. These reforms resulted into positive developments in Fata. This fact was observed in 2013 election which was unlike any other elections in the history of the region. The governor of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has termed these reforms a watershed in bringing the

¹⁵ "FATA Political Reforms".

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Syed Irfan Zia, "Far-reaching Fata reforms unveiled", *Dawn*, (Islamabad), August 14, 2009.

¹⁸ "Major Changes Made in FCR: Fata People Get Political Rights", *Dawn*, (Islamabad), August 13, 2011.

unstable and conflict-ridden tribal areas into the mainstream political system of Pakistan.¹⁹

In this regard the Fata Committee, comprised of members of all major political parties of Pakistan, met on March 14, 2013. The purpose of this get-together was to give its estimation of the pre-election situation in Fata and to give certain suggestions for the future course of action, mainly political development of the area. They proposed some recommendations which are:

- The two regulations — amendments in FCR and extension of PPO to Fata — should properly be implemented.
- The government should ensure all the political parties to properly and freely operate in tribal areas without any restrictions.
- The government should establish reserved MNA seats for women of Fata. Women should be given the right to vote fully and for that purpose separate polling stations for women should be set up in all agencies and Frontier Regions.
- The role of media during election days is important. For that the government should provide security to the media so that they can cover all the activities and events in Fata.
- The Government should ensure free and fair elections in Fata and in the rest of the country.
- All these suggestions should be implemented without any delay before the 2013 general elections.²⁰

Views of Fata's People Regarding Political Reforms

The first thing in this regard is that we have totally misunderstood Fata, its people, its tribal structure. From the very start the government of Pakistan intentionally or by mistake romanticized the situation wrongly. Since 1947 the government of Pakistan never tried to understand the ground realities existed in Fata. "The very term *Azad Qabayl* (free tribes) used for Fata is wrong in its very essence. The fact is that the people of Fata were never

¹⁹ "Fata Political Reforms".

²⁰ "Shortcomings of political parties act. FTA politicians call for quick reforms before polls" <<http://tribune.com.pk/story/521534/shortcomings-of-political-parties-act-fata-politicians-call-for-quick-reforms-before-polls/>> as well <<http://www.thefrontierpost.com/article/212461/>>, accessed May 30, 2013.

Azad (free). How can they be free when FCR like laws and regulations were there and are still in use over there?"²¹

There is a misperception and exaggeration of the fact that the people of Fata wanted to retain their own tribal system and did not want assimilation with the rest of the country. It is completely wrong and exaggerated. "When the people of Fata voted for Pakistan—in a referendum held after independence— and showed their loyalties towards the state of Pakistan then why Fata was dealt differently, why FCR and other inhuman regulations were retained by the government, why no development took place, and why people were deprived of their basic human and political rights?"²²

During an interview, a man belonging to North Waziristan while commenting on the current situation in Fata expressed his views this way, "The fact is that the people of Fata are fed up with their miserable life. They want change in true sense. They want the same laws that are prevailing in the rest of the country. They want the same judicial system, mainstreaming in Pakistan, education for their children and basic rights discussed in the constitution of Pakistan".²³ In a session with Ijaz Khan he expressed his views that, "No society is static and it goes through changes with time. In British time the circumstances were different and those laws were fit for running the affairs of tribal belt at that time. To continue with the same policies was a big mistake on the part of Pakistani state".²⁴

Hamayoun Wazir, who participated in 2013 general elections as a candidate from Fata, sharing his views said, "During the elections campaign in different areas I observed that how people were happy with this election. Every day was like Eid day. I felt the thrust among the people for the candidate and for the other political activities i.e. casting of votes and other political participation. The situation of Fata would have been much different if such and other reforms had been introduced on time and a little bit attention had been given to the development of Fata by the federal government of Pakistan".²⁵

²¹ A local running a medical store in Mohmand Agency, interview conducted on February 23, 2014.

²² Naureen Nasreen, Lecturer of Political Science, University of Peshawar, interview.

²³ A local, belonging to North Waziristan, interview, conducted on February 17, 2014.

²⁴ Ijaz Khan, Professor of International Relations, University of Peshawar, interview.

²⁵ Hamayoun Wazir, belonging to North Waziristan, who participated in the 2013 general elections as a candidate for National Assembly seat, interview, conducted on January 26, 2014.

The reforms introduced by the PPP government have changed the course of history of tribal areas and are appreciated by the people. These reforms have somehow reduced the hatred and anger which the people of Fata have about the federal government. "Since independence the people of Fata have been treated like aliens. The current reforms have brought some hope to the people that change is possible if the government takes some positive steps like this. The 2013 general elections day is considered as a new dawn in the history of Fata".²⁶

While commenting on the administrative system of Fata local people shared their views this way: "The social structure of Fata was not because of FCR. The FCR was because of the social structure. In the past the people were not that much aware, they had no exposure to the external world, no proper education and no economic boom, but now they are not like the past. The FCR like regulation is no more valid in Fata. This regulation was introduced in the 19th century and now we are living in the 21st century. Is it justice that such an outdated regulation is still running the affairs of Fata? If amendments are proposed and made in the constitution of Pakistan time to time to go with the pace of time, needs of the people and changing circumstance and conditions, then why such things are not possible in FCR? The moment FCR was introduced, at that time the situation was different but now it has very much changed."²⁷ "To bring changes and amendments in FCR look like a joke. The only change the government can do is to abolish FCR and to introduce alternative laws or extend the laws of Pakistan to Fata".²⁸ "If FCR is such a good law then the federal government of Pakistan should introduce it in the whole country, otherwise it should be abolished in Fata through a presidential act".²⁹

Elections 2013 in FATA: A Voyage towards Mainstreaming

The 2013 election in Fata was a momentous day in its history. For the first time in history people of the tribal areas had the chance to use their right to vote. A great number of people happily and enthusiastically took part in the election and voted for twelve deatsof Fata for the National Assembly of Pakistan. Under the Constitution, Fata is allowed only 12 seats in the National Assembly and none in the Provincial Assembly. In this regard, Bajaur has two

²⁶ A local belonging to Khyber Agency, interview, conducted on February 10, 2014.

²⁷ A man running medical store in Bajaur Agency (Bazar), interview, conducted on February 12, 2014.

²⁸ A local of North Waziristan, interview, conducted on February 25, 2014.

²⁹ A student belonging to Orakzai Agency, interview, conducted on February 26, 2014.

seats, Mohmand one, Khyber two, Orakzai one, Kurram two, North Waziristan one and South Waziristan has two seats. The frontier regions of Peshawar, Kohat, Bannu, Dera Ismail Khan, Tank and Lakki Marwat form a single constituency, NA-47.³⁰ The total registered voters in Fata are 1,738,313, including 596,079 women.³¹

Latest steps and reforms taken by the government are leading Fata to positive changes. One may not be wrong to say that the 2013 general elections in Fata have proved a harbinger and a good omen for the area. These elections were important in so many ways. Especially the women participation and awareness among the masses is something very positive and encouraging. Some new positive trends observed are given below:

Political Awareness and Enthusiasm in Fata

It should be understood that all the dwellers of Fata are not militants. The majority of the people living over there are peace loving, patriotic and sensible citizens of Pakistan. There is a need to differentiate them from militants and other such groups and to treat them differently other than those creating troubles and disturbances. The tribal areas of Pakistan are considered as the most dangerous place in the world by both regional actors and the international community but the people of Fata have proved it wrong. Despite Taliban's threats and uncertainty in the area, they positively participated in the 2013 general elections. All main political parties visibly campaigned in Fata during the election. Out of 339 candidates contesting for 12 National Assembly seats from Fata, 81 candidates represented different political parties. It was observed during the election days that different parties' flags were flying on rooftops, trees, shops and markets. The parties' banners and posters were displayed everywhere. Even though Taliban had threatened the people that democracy was un-Islamic and those participating in the elections would be targeted, contestants of different parties held street meetings, rallies and opened campaign offices in different parts of Fata.³²

People wore badges and logos of their respective parties on their chests. Similarly, vehicles were decorated with posters, flags and stickers of different parties. It was observed that a large number

³⁰ Zulfiqar Ali, "Elections in Fata: A Daunting Challenge", Dawn News, May 5, 2013.

³¹ Ibid.

³² "FATA Tribesmen embrace historic polls", available at <http://dunyanews.tv/election/index.php/news_detail/172194-FATA-tribesmen-embrace-historic-polls>.

of people thronged the election offices of their respective parties including Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and other prominent religious parties. The level of enthusiasm was such high that during election days people were served with delicious foods like rice and meat along with green tea.³³

Shift from Independent to Party-backed Candidacy in Election

Political parties were supposedly there in Fata during the 1970s general elections and some factions even manage to get their candidates nominated to the National Assembly and the Senate. But these candidates were not backed by political parties and were considered as independent candidates. With the extension of the PPO to Fata, now political parties have the right to legally carry out political activities in the tribal areas.³⁴ Traditionally, members of parliament from the region were independent, and tended to support whichever government was in power, in order to have access to patronage of state resources. Another striking feature of this election was the number of candidates per constituency - there were, for example, 40 candidates for NA-36, a constituency in Mohmand Agency, while the national average was between 10 and 20 candidates per constituency.³⁵

Since the introduction of free campaigning and the entry of political parties into the race, as well as the large numbers of independents, it is clear that old electoral trends, observed in the past, may no longer exist. This time there was a totally changed situation where different parties' nominees and their supporters had freely raised their respective parties' flags and were carrying out political activities with no major disruption. Despite security reasons major political parties were organizing meetings and rallies in different parts of Fata.

Women Participation in Election Changes the Contour of History

Though women were banned to vote in some districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa i.e. Dir and Buner, election campaign in Fata was of different kind. Like other settled areas of Pakistan much excitement and enthusiasm was observed among the women of tribal areas. Despite Taliban threats and other social taboos women

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Afrasiab Khattak, "Reforms in Fata", Dawn News, October 25, 2011.

³⁵ Zalan Khan, "Fata: An election unlike any other", the writer is the founder of the website *QissaKhwani* and tweets under @qissakhwani.

in Fata went to the polling stations to exercise their right to vote. This was seen for the first time in the history of tribal areas that women voted for their respective party's candidates. Apart from exercising their right to vote some women contested election as a candidate for National Assembly seat. This was a good and positive trend which would further improve socio-political conditions in Fata.

According to some political analysts, the wind of change is promptly taking place in Fata mainly because of two factors. In their view, political environment of Fata has changed mainly after the extension of PPO to the region. All political parties including major religious parties encouraged and mobilized women voters. In this regard JUI (F), Jamaat-e-Islami and JUI (S) were actively involved to raise their vote bank against other political competitor. According to a survey out of 1,616,601 (more than 1.6 million) registered voters in tribal areas, the number of women voters is 552,794 with highest number of women voters registered in Bajaur Agency (132,366) followed by the lowest (11,704) registered women voters in North Waziristan Agency.³⁶ In this regard Khyber Agency is ranking second where registered votes of women are 125,268.³⁷ While commenting on women participation in 2013 election Aftab Khan Afridi from Khyber Agency stated that, "despite Taliban threats and social taboos women are determined and willing to use their right to vote for the first time in history for changing their destiny".³⁸

Women participation in 2013 election was not only limited to casting their votes. They participated in the election as a candidate as well and contested for National Assembly seats reserved for Fata. For instance, Badam Zari from Bajaur Agency stood as a candidate and contested election against 25 male candidates, who are considered highly influential and powerful figures in Bajaur Agency. Although she did not win the election in her respective constituency, yet, being the first woman in Fata to take part in the elections, she paved the way for the other women in the future elections in the agency. Her participation in the election is no doubt something very positive and is really an encouraging step and can prove a turning point for the bright future of the area.

³⁶ Maqbool Malik, "Women's role can change Fata election results", *Nation*, (Islamabad) May 3, 2013.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

The women participation in elections bore fruits when Aisha Gulalai from South Waziristan Agency and became the Member of National Assembly (MNA) on a reserved seat for women. She started her career as a human rights activist from South Waziristan. Due to her active role PPPP gave her a party ticket in the 2008 election, but she did not manage to compete because she was too young at that time. Subsequently, she decided to join the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and was selected as a member of the party's central committee. In 2013 elections she managed to contest for a seat reserved for women on a PTI ticket.³⁹

The youngest woman MNA (Gulalai) from tribal areas was determined that she would discuss the issue of reserved seats for women from Fata in the National Assembly of Pakistan. She stated that, "Fata has no such quota, and I will raise the issue on the floor of the house as this is a discrimination against women." She further added, "Fata should be demarcated as a separate province with its own governor and chief minister".⁴⁰ On another occasion she stated that tribal people are highly potential and talented. She mentioned the example of Maria Toorpakai, a female Pakistani squash star who also belongs to South Waziristan. For this purpose people of Fata need education to uplift their potential, talents and energies. Gulalai clearly stated that, "people of Fata are now fed up with indiscriminate activities of the militants, daily bomb blast and killings. People are ready now to send their daughters to school and for this purpose there is a need to open schools and universities for higher education in tribal areas."⁴¹

Religious Parties' role and Influence

Before the introduction of PPO in Fata, the political parties were not allowed to carry out political activities. At that time some religious groups had dominated the whole region. Due to their religiosity people were tending towards them and they had followers everywhere in tribal areas. They easily managed to organize political activities as they had sympathizers among the militant groups as well. Other political parties were not allowed in

³⁹ Fauzee Khan Mohmand, "Aisha Gulalai: First Female MNA from Fata", available at <<http://thespokesman.pk/index.php/history/item/5567-first-female-mna-from-fata>>, as well as at <<http://tribune.com.pk/story/556256/making-history-vernal-parliamentarian-set-to-shine-on-political-stage/>>, accessed June 01, 2013.

⁴⁰ Mureeb Mohmand, "Making history: Vernal parliamentarian set to shine on political stage", *Express Tribune*, (Islamabad), May 30, 2013.

⁴¹ Ibid.

the area and that is why they were very influential. With the passage of time they lost their role and popularity. The main reason was their close affiliation with the militant groups. The brutal activities of the militants led to a chaotic situation in Fata where people were living a miserable life. People had seen the real faces of these elements. As some of the so-called religious parties had affiliations with militants, the people of tribal area blamed them for their agonies.⁴²

While commenting on the fast deteriorating situation in Fata a former MNA from Swat, Adnan Aurangzeb, said, "When for the first time adult franchise was extended in 1996, people in Fata were thinking that more was coming but nothing happened. In 2002 general elections, which were conducted under military patronage all the liberals were marginalized, and the religious parties managed to win. This was the most important factor where militancy rose into full swing".⁴³ In these elections, those affiliated to the Musharraf-sponsored six-party religious alliance, the MuttahidaMajlis-e-Amal (MMA), won seven of Fata's 12 National Assembly seats.⁴⁴ The 2008 elections were somehow different from that of 2002 elections. These general elections brought some positive change in Fataas they had political representation of major political parties. Similarly, in 2013 elections religious parties managed to win only one National Assembly seat. This was an emerging new trend in Fata where people were fed up with violence and brutal suppression by the militants. People of Fata want a change and are looking for a bright future.

Record Voters Turnout

Another positive aspect observed in 2013 election in Fata is the record voters' turnout. The 2013 election is seen to be different from that of 2008. All major political parties participated in the election and carried out their activities freely. The most remarkable side of the election was the record voters' turnout. This really showed that there is political awareness among the people and they are no more naïve like the past. According to an estimate in 2013 election voters' turnout in Fatawas 37%.⁴⁵

⁴² Afrasiab Khattak, "Reforms in Fata", *Dawn News*, (Islamabad), October 25, 2011.

⁴³ "Political Reforms in Fata", available at <<http://waziristanhills.com/FATA/PoliticalReforms/tabid/135/language/en-GB/Default.aspx>>.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ "Election in Fata: A Special Report", A special report on general elections in Fata published by the Shaheed Bhutto Foundation (SBF) on May 16 and later updated on

Voters' turnout would have been different if all the votes had polled timely and properly. The issue of Internally Displaced People (IDPs) was counted the major reason for the low turnout. Candidates in tribal areas were facing serious problems of reaching out to voters that had migrated to different parts of the country in search of safe places. This had made the political parties agitation extremely tricky and time-consuming. Had there not been the issue of IDPs the result would have been amazing and interesting.

People of Fata Voted for a Change

People of Fata have suffered immensely in all walks of life. Uncertainty and insecurity are the prevailing features of the area. Continuous crises and sufferings both on the part of militants and collateral damages due to military operations against these militants have torn down the very social fabric of the tribal areas. Indiscriminate killings, beheadings, bomb blasts have turned the area into a turmoil. A large number of people have left their homes and huts and migrated to other safe areas due to clashes between militants and security forces. Now they want change and an end to their miseries.

People responded positively to the 2013 election in hope that it would bring change to their area. During an interview to the AFP, a doctor, named Miraj Ali from the Mohmand Agency, said, "People want change. They want change in system not just change of faces".⁴⁶ Similarly, people from Khyber, Bajaur and Waziristan agencies while talking to the AFP blamed the previous governments for their miseries and bad law and order situation in their areas. They added that due to military operations hundreds of people have been displaced from their home and towns. Another man from Fata, named RaqeebUllah, during an interview expressed his views in a very harsh way. He said, "Our former leaders have sold us in return of US dollars and they were more like wolves. Now we want change, a revolution which would purge all these corrupt politicians".⁴⁷

June 6, 2013, available at <<http://www.slideshare.net/fatanews/special-report-aprilelections-2013-in-fata>>.

⁴⁶ "FATA tribesmen embrace historic polls", available at <http://dunyanews.tv/election/index.php/news_detail/172194-FATA-tribesmen-embrace-historic-polls>.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

Conclusion

For decades people of Fatahad been deprived of basic human and political rights. In the absence of proper governmental setup a vacuum was created in Fata which was filled by the militants and other such affiliated groups. Their indiscriminate activities turned the tribal areas into turmoil where state writ was almost zero. Initially the people of the tribal areas had sympathies with such elements but with the passage of time their real face and bad intentions were no more a secret. Keeping in view the miseries of tribal people and the rapid spread of militancy, the federal government finally woke up to the fact and decided to introduce certain reforms in Fata. In this regard the PPP government introduced some reforms and amendments to FCR. People of Fata welcomed and appreciated such positive moves and they demonstrated it in May 2013 general elections. People of Fata enthusiastically participated in the election and deemed it a good omen for the brighter future of their respective areas.

No movement whether it's political or religious can become a success story without local support. Same is the case with Fata. People have rejected militants and their support base is gradually decreasing in Fata. Such support base of the militants can further decrease if there growing awareness among the common people. Such awareness is possible by establishing a network of political organizations in the tribal belt.

Keeping in view the intensity of the problem of militancy and chaotic law and order situation of the region, bold steps are needed to meet this challenge properly. The government should introduce other reform packages on the same footing as were initiated by the previous PPP government. There is a need to implement these reforms on immediate basis with no further delay.

The federal government should initiate developmental projects for the uplifting of socio-economic conditions of the area. Poverty and lack of education are among the other reasons which compelled the poor people of the tribal areas to look for an alternative which was provided to them by the militants. Last but not least, it is extremely important that the government must seriously engage itself in winning the battle of minds and hearts of the people of the turbulent area without which no durable peace can return to the area. There are misunderstandings and misperceptions among the people of Fata which have been cultivated in their minds by different hostile elements. All this can come to an end if the

federal government properly pays heed to this issue and bring this turbulent area into the mainstream.

