Invisible Shackles In The Feet Of Pakhtun Women Hampering Their Political Progress

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Abstract

In this article, traditions, Laws, attitudes, and behaviours of the Pukhtun society towards women are debated for the purpose to analyse the main obstacles faced by Pukhtun women in different fields of life including politics. The primary questions under investigation are How does Patriarchy put shackles in the feet of women of the Traditional Pakhtun society? How Pukhtunwali and even religion (Islam) is used as a tool against women’s progress by male members of the society? What are the various religious, socio-cultural, economic, and political obstacles faced by the women of the traditional society? An effort has been made in this article to highlight the actual invisible shackles in their (women) feet that obstruct them from involving actively in various fields of life including politics. Secondary sources including journals, books, and various articles are used to collect relevant data for the article. This study highlights the various features of Pukhtunwali, reverence of Pukhtuns towards their customs and traditions, and their affinity with the religion Islam. Pukhtuns observe religious rituals but consider their identity is with the observance of Pukhtunwali. This article emphasizes that strict abidance of various features of Pukhtunwali subjugated women of the Pakhtun society and restrict their lives. Women of the Pukhtun society are bound by their traditions and even
sacrifice lives for the protection of family honor and the safety of their family male members. Such a situation makes lives of the Pukhtun women miserable. Likewise, they face various religious, socio-cultural, economic, legal and political obstacles which are considered to be against their traditions and in turn block their way to success.

**Keywords:** Pukhtunwali, subjugated, traditions, customs, restrict, invisible shackles.

**Introduction**

The existing literature on traditional women political leadership consider women’s illiteracy, their economic dependence on male members, lack of interest in political affairs, less political opportunities are the reasons for their meager presence in various fields of life including politics (see Hanochi, 2001: pp.114-115; Iwanaga, 2008: p.125). Such assertion lacks a more nuanced understanding of the role of the Pakhtunwali observed by women in the attainment of the political field. Women of traditional societies are facing various hurdles to attain political leadership positions. Though there are some exceptions where Pukhtun women attained political eminence generally, the conditions are depressing towards women political participation. Pakhtun women’s population face various political, socio-economic, cultural, and religious hurdles in their lives. Males of the society use Pukhtunwali(code of conduct) as a tool against women to bound their lives.

Pukhtuns always consider the code (Pukhtunwali) ideal conduct and have been trying to observe and follow it for centuries. Pukhtuns’ closely associated these features with their Pukhtun identity. These are not features themselves but an intricate system of justice and honor which is derived from Pukhtuns’ particular value orientations. These value orientations are equality, autonomy, bravery, individuality, and aggressiveness, collectively called Pukhtunwali (Krbek & Pollitt, 1977:15).

This paper discusses that Pukhtuns have a greater fondness towards Pukhtunwali and the religion Islam. They ponder both the same (Minhaj-ul-Hasan, 2015:215). The majority of Pukhtuns are Sunni Muslims. Rehman Baba (great Pukhtun poet) strongly responds to those who consider Islam and Pukhtunwali as different. Rehman Baba replied:

“You keep on considering Pashto and Islam as two different things, whereas in my opinion if God were to be a human being, He surely would have been a Pakhtoon” (Singh et al, 2014:n.d).

Religion is particularly evident in their deeds and behavior. Barth states that Pukhtun society has an impact of both Islam and Pukhtun ethnic values. Pukhtunwali is pursued along with Sharia law (Barth, 1981). Islam is the dominating factor in the formation of their social structure and ideology. They also follow Islamic law (Shariah). Although, there are slight variances in the dialects, traditions, and customs of every Pukhtun tribe, but shared social norms. Thus, Pukhtuns are abiding by two types of codes, Islamic law, and Pukhtunwali (Naz et al., 2012:63). They pondered themselves both as Muslims following the Islamic laws and Pukhtuns by practicing Pukhtunwali as similar things. Pukhtuns prefer religion for modeling an ideal life but follow Pukhtunwali while deciding the communal matters (Kaker, 2003:03). So, it is generally perceived that they give secondary status to the religion in the implementation
of their decisions. Thus, both Islam and customary laws are truly observed in the same way, but a great variance is seen in its implementation (Naz et al., 2012:65).

This paper debates that Pukhtuns have integrated both Islam and Pukhtunwali in a way that benefitted males of the society. Different features of Pukhtunwali assign the subjugated positions to women and in turn hamper their lives. Likewise, the interpretation of the Quranic verses by the religious scholars’ further grant dominating status to males in various matters. These are some of the reasons which make females of traditional societies more vulnerable. Different challenges are faced by Pakhtun women in their society which impede their way to a relatively better standard of life as well as towards their success. Though, Pukhtuns consider themselves as true Muslims abiding by the Islamic rules and having similarities in Pukhtunwali as well as in Islam. But there are some apparent variances in both Islam and Pukhtunwali, which increase obstacles for women in their way to a prosperous life.

1.1. Research objectives and questions
The purpose of this paper is to explore problems faced by women of the traditional societies created by Patriarchy. Similarly, the way Pukhtunwali is used as a tool against women’s progress by male members of the society? The clarification is important to comprehend the customary laws made and pursued by the patriarchal social organizations while dealing with the rights of Pukhtun women. This paper also tries to examine, how these patriarchal laws create hurdles for women’s progress? It is also crucial to find out what are the various religious, socio-cultural, economic, and political obstacles facing by the women of the traditional society? The inquiry of such hindrances’ enables us to assess the miserable conditions of women of the patriarchal societies. Such investigation will improve our understanding of the customs and traditions of the patriarchal societies. Likewise, the manner these customs and traditions are used against the progress of women by the male members of patriarchal societies are also assessed.

1.2 Significance of the study:
Pukhtuns throughout the world show great respect towards Pukhtunwali, they pursue the code valiantly. Rehman argues that Pukhtunwali is centuries’ old accepted code of conduct, followed by Pukhtuns at the cost of their lives (Shams-ur-Rehman, 2015:299). This paper opens areas for further research on the Pakhtuns code of conduct (Pukhtunwali). The impact of these codes on women’s lives, their progress, and development. This paper paves way for further studies on various socio-economic, cultural, religious, and political hurdles facing by Pakhtun women in the name of Pukhtunwali.

2. Theoretical Framework:
The theory of Patriarchy is used in this paper as a theoretical framework. It would help us to analyze the actual problems facing by women of the patriarchal societies. The investigation of their submissiveness, their backwardness would be easy to access. Walby gives two different forms of Patriarchy (private and public). She argues that the base of the Private patriarchy is household production as the key site of women’s oppression. Whereas, Public patriarchy is based in public sites such as employment and the state (Welby.1990:21).
According to Lerner, Patriarchy is that “men hold power in all the important institutions of society” and that “women are deprived of access to such power”. However, it does not imply that “women are either totally powerless or deprived of rights, influence, and resources” (Lerner 1989:239).

The theory of patriarchy is relevant to the paper as it provides the appropriate insight of the women’s problems, causes of their submissiveness, backwardness in different fields of their lives including politics. This theory highlights that basic features of patriarchal system like dominance, power, hierarchy, and competition. Thus patriarchy is a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, exploit and oppress women.

Beauvior (1974) argues that the term ‘women’s subordination’ mentions the inferior position of women in decision making and their lack of access to resources etc. and to the patriarchal domination that women are subjected to in most societies. Thus feeling of powerlessness, biasness, experience of limited self-esteem and self-confidence contribute to the subservience of women (Beauvior. 1974). Theory of Patriarchy in this paper would help us to know how the customs and traditions are influenced by the man made notions. In this paper, we will examine the customary laws made by patriarchal social organization which are pursued while dealing with the rights of Pukhtun women. Similarly, we will investigate Pukhtunwali, in which most of the features are against rights of the Pukhtun women, which in turn makes life of the women vulnerable and exposed to exploitation. Pukhtuns use their cultural codes to benefit males as compared to females and in turn grant them subservient position in the society.

3. Research Methodology:
Qualitative research method is used in this study. Secondary sources like research papers, books, journals and newspaper articles are used in the collection of data. Secondary sources help us to collect relevant data regarding the historic context of the study and it is also helpful in the analysis of different features of the traditional Pakhtun society. This would provide an insight into the hurdles faced by Pakhtun women in various fields of life including politics. Although there are precedents of the women who showed their resilience and carved out some political space, by large women are exploited in the name of Pukhtunwali and are subject to male dominance and control.

4. BARRIERS TO WOMEN’S ADVANCEMENT
Women of traditional patriarchal societies faced various socio-cultural, religious, economic and political obstacles which hampers their way to progress. These obstacles make lives of the Pukhtun women more miserable. Some of these barriers are briefly discussed below to improve our understanding regarding the meagre presence of pakhtun women in different fields.

4.1) RELIGIOUS AND ECONOMIC STRUCTURES
Selective reading of religious text are often used for the justification of the religious practices and cultural norms which create barriers in the way of women political participation and empowerment. Such interpretations support the patriarchal notion and supress women of the society. Likewise, various sections of the society use religion to promote their interests, creates more issues.
Saleem posits that religion and patriarchy go side by side in patriarchal societies. Lives of women are regulated by religious beliefs. They even face discrimination in the name of religion. Saleem argues that wearing the veil and minimum visibility in public places are the constraints imposed on them in the name of religious and societal norms (Saleem, 2006:7). So the diversity between the theological and living Islam increases problems for women. Mernissi (leading feminist writer) states that early Muslims scholars have interpreted the sacred text according to their interest. They have misguided the public and manipulated Islam. She further posits that Hadiths were explained in a way that benefitted males and subjugated women (Mernissi, 1995:119). Thus, differences are evident about the status of women in religion, traditions and later the actual situation as well (Kaushik, 1993:XII).

People of these regions follow both Sharia laws and customary laws for their problems. Their policies toward women are implausible and unpredictable (Critelli, 2010). It is stated that “Pukhtuna nim Quran mani: nim Pukhtunwali”(Pukhtuns half use Quran and half Pukhtunwali) (Christensen, 1988:145)

Islam is closely related to the Pukhtun identity which is used by local, national and regional political domains. Therefore, Banerjee states that religious leaders used Islam for the unification of Pukhtuns in crises. She credited the ideology based on both Islam and Pukhtunwali behind the success of KK movement. This proves that Islam and Pukhtun customs move beyond the living Islam and is used in the political and social reform movements as well (Banerjee, 2000:160). Christensen argues that Islamic teachings are blended with the Pukhtun identity to attract masses of the region and gain their support (Christensen, 1988). In today’s world, religion is the prime force to impel and mobilize the public (Huntington, 1993:192). Thus leaders through religiously legitimated appeal attempted to mobilize people for political actions. But in case of conflict, they further persuade them for the correctness of their conduct through religious connotation (Christensen, 1988:145). Thus, theological and intellectual rhetoric creates a sectarian demarcation between different religious groups. Different groups and sects have their own interpretation of Islamic doctrines. This is because of the absence of a single centrally acceptable religious authority who left a vacuum of interpretation which in turn provides a basis for various doctrines (Gaier, 2010:2).

Such interpretation creates hurdles for women particularly in the NWFP and Baluchistan provinces and results in their absence from public life. Even though there are notable differences in the status of women in urban and rural areas. Majority of the women population in rural areas are deprived of their basic fundamental rights, while urban women get a slightly better deal. Urban women have better access to education and job opportunities because of their access to resources. They are, therefore, unwilling to accept a subjugated role under the traditional patriarchal system (Saleem, 2006: 5-6).

The diverse interpretations of Islam by the state and religious elites regarding women and their participation in politics create difficulties in their lives which make them dependent in every walk of their lives (Critelli, 2010).

Shaheed argues that different strata of the society in Pakistan are using religion to protect their own interest (Shaheed, 2009). As religious preachers and parties have a significant influence especially in rural areas. People of such areas grant them great reverence. Therefore, the upper class used them in their own favor as well. Qasir posits that Zia’s Islamisation
program was focused on the social role of the urban females. The slogan of Zia ideology “Chaddar” (veil) and “Chardivari” (home) (Qasir, 1992: 118) believed in the confinement of women within their houses. So, Islam is used by the leaders to pave the way for politico-religious forces and to assert hegemonic control over the political discourse (Shaheed, 2009:6). During Zia-ul-Haq regime, the Islamic political ideology of Jamaat-i-Islami (JI) was followed. He mixed religion with politics for the purpose to gain legitimacy and acquiring political allies to prolong the rule (Chengappa, 2004: 1-2).

Scholars argue that such religious parties always opposed the liberation of women. They are even against women’s political participation and their presence in public life. In one such instance when Jammat- e- Islami (JI) launched a campaign against women’s involvement in the National Parliament (Awan& Kokab, 2016:846), they called it against Islam if a woman would lead the Islamic country. Therefore, they had opposed Benazir Bhutto to be an elected Prime Minister of Pakistan. Ulema perceived her leadership as pernicious to society and would damage the Islamic ideals regarding the family (Haeri, 1993:200). As Islamic scholars argue that a “nation that would hand over its leadership to a woman would not enjoy welfare and prosperity. Pakistan would suffer if it was governed by a woman.”. “Women should stay at home. . . The religious scholars argue that there are many men in her party. Why don’t they come forward?” (Sekine, 2014:29).

Saleem argues that the Islamization process had a deep impact on women of the whole country but specifically of the North West Frontier Province (now KP), the already patriarchal society. The power and influence of these political parties began to increase and women began to live in fear of discrimination and subjugation in the name of religion (Saleem, 2006:8). Similarly, Mullahs (religious leaders) have a powerful impact in rural areas. They have interpreted some of the verses of the Holy Quran in a manner which have a glimpse against women’s equality and political participation. Unfortunately, common Pashtun men followed their dictates (Jamal, 2015: 24).

Islam guaranteed parity between males and females. The misinterpretation of Islamic rules by men makes it biased against women. Such interpretations cause male-domination in a society and grant women of such societies subjugated positions (Shahid. 2007:125). Likewise, the amalgamation of cultural norms with religious interpretation makes women more dependent. Cultural norms of the society encourage separation and isolation of women, often justified through religious connotation (Shaheed, 2009).

I argue that gender stereotyping through cultural beliefs increased the problems of women more specifically of the Pukhtun society. They are still facing problems like illiteracy, unemployment, exclusion from property, and the decision- making process which curtail their role in societal matters as well. One of the causes for their minimal presence in the political field is their economic dependence as well.

Naz, et al., (2012) argue that traditionally Pukhtuns have ambiguous norms for female inheritance. Property and other assets are distributed among family members. Property is pondered to be a symbol of authority and power and is related to males of the society. Thus, there is an observable difference in religious practices and cultural traditions of the area. Sharia has allocated property and inheritance rights to both the genders (Naz, et al., 2012:69).
Khan posits that the significance of Zar (gold), Zan (women), and Zamin (land) are the main principles of Pukhtunwali and the very base of the local ideology. The concept of family, property, and private ownership provides dominance to male members in terms of inheritance which is a base of patriarchy. Mostly, males have been given inheritance and property rights while Pukhtun women are denied such rights (Khan, N, 2012:12).

According to Pukhtunwali women are not entitled to own lands independently. Their shares in properties are seized by concerned males of the family. This makes them economically dependent on their males. Such economic dependence further subjugates them in the family as well as in society.

Mahbub ul Haq posits that cultural values have isolated women from economic activities (Mahbub-ul-Haq Human Development Center, 2000). Their main responsibility is to perform household chores. Their role is neither paid nor recognized. Similarly, males are considered to be the bread earners and are responsible for the whole family (Joseph et al., 2005:723). So, males are providers and protectors of the family while females are passive members. Majority of the women are not allowed to do jobs as well (Awan and Kokab, 2016: 05).

The above-stated discussion demonstrates that discrepancies in the political and economic fields are deeply prevalent within the Pukhtun society which further subjugates them. Furthermore, these problems have adverse consequences in rural areas where lives are mostly traditionally driven. Such traditions assign more power to males who got more privileges in the field of politics and power. The blatant exploitation of religion by encouraging socio-cultural restrictions such as discriminatory customs and traditions, patriarchal setup of society, and economic dependence are the bases for the minimal role of women in the field of politics.

4.2 SOCIO-CULTURAL IMPEDIMENTS FACED BY THE PUKHTUN WOMEN
Socio-cultural norms and practices are found in every social organization. The abidance of such practices assists the individuals to live in peace and harmony. These practices cover every field of life including social, economic, religious, and political as well. But, in Pukhtun society, these practices are mostly male-dominated which increases the difficulties of women. Moghadam(1992) posits that different norms of the Pukhtun society restrict women in their own way. These practices make the life of women more dependent and miserable. In Pukhtun’s patriarchal society, separate spheres are allocated for both males and females. Jamal states that women of the Pukhtun society live according to the established cultural values, and social norms (2015:19). The observance of the prevailing norms and values makes the lives of these women more deplorable.

Mann (2005:3) argues that males adopt aggressive and violent behaviour whereas females have a passive and submissive attitudes to protect the honour of the family. Choo (2006:588) posits that women are considered to take the burden of cultural representation and are symbolic bearers of honour, traditions and national identity.

Though in Pukhtun society, both genders are bound to Pakhtu, the word ‘Pakhto’ is not only a language but is a symbol of beliefs, attitudes, integrity and cultural identity of Pukhtuns. Since childhood, Pukhtuns are aware of their gender limitations. There is a clear demarcation of their responsibilities and duties as well. Grima posits that hujra (men space), turban, gun, saritob (manliness), gherat (Honour), hospitality, granting an exile, badal (revenge) are men’s
Pakhtu while modesty, shame, tears, purdah, gherat, and endurance of hardship are considered to be women Pakhtu (Grima, 1992:01). While Tarburwali (agnatic rivalry) and Namus (honour) is usually used in terms of enemy (Christensen. 1988:147).

Different features of Pukhtunwali rely more on the protection and chastity of women. Pardah (an important feature of Pukhtunwali) should be observed by both Pukhtun men and women (Fazal, 2013:41). But, different practices like Vulvar (bride money), swara, Tor, and pardah in Pukhtun society make the lives of women vulnerable. Vulvar (bride money) is one such practice prevalent in Pukhtun society. Khan, N (2012:5) argues that according to the custom, males of the bride took money from the bridegroom or his family. The family of bride ponders it is beneficial for a girl. Nonetheless, it has socio-psychological consequences which are faced by girls’ throughout their lives. Such custom further empowers males and degrades women of society. Women remained submissive and have no importance domestically as they are considered to be purchased like any other commodity.

Likewise, Swara is another prevalent, old custom deep-rooted in Pukhtun society. Swara is a substitute to eliminate the feud among families or even tribes. According to the custom, a girl from the culprit’s family or tribe is given as compensation to an aggrieved party. Local Pukhtuns followed the custom on the plea that the sacrifice of a girl can protect the life of the whole family or tribe (Ali, 2018). The sacrifice of a girl is for pursuing apology and pardon from the culprits. Girls are the sufferers of such practices who have to pay the price of crimes committed by males of the family or tribe. As mentioned in one of the Pakhtu song. Khowenday chay keenee roonra staee; roonra che keenee khowenday swaray kay warkaweena Translation: “When sisters get together, they kudos their brothers’, but when brothers meet, they give their sisters away as Swara” (Minallah, 2006:1-2).

Another most prevalent custom is Tor. The literal meaning of Tor is black, but in the Pukhtun context it means adultery or illicit relations. It is a crime, the penalty of which is execution. Anyone who is suspicious of illicit relations has been killed by the family of an involved female (Khan, N, 2012:7). But Khan posits that sometimes this custom is used against the opponents as a reprisal. Tor is used against females of the rival family to blame her through false propagation of her involvement in illicit relations. Without inspecting the charges, women became the victim of suspicions. Women of these societies are disempowered who can neither defend themselves nor can escape execution (Khan, N, 2012:7).

Scholars state that the responsibility of family repute lies on a woman’s shoulders whose dignity, modesty and honour are above all other matters. If any act of female gains a bad reputation, her whole family is disgraced. Such defamation becomes the basis of peighore (taunt). Feuds and bloodshed are commenced for the purpose to regain the lost honour of a family. In some cases, such vendettas last for centuries. Any female responsible for damaging the honour of a family through her wrong acts also loses her life (Naz et al., 2012:16). Thus, Pardah is considered to be the most admirable way for the safety and security of female’s honour and reputation, which is associated with the honour of family and tribe as well (Rzehak, 2011:10).

Significantly, under Pukhtunwali the participation of women in the political sphere is pondered to be a threat to the prestige of a family and tribe. Therefore, the political domain is
occupied mainly by men. Umer et al.(2016:149) argue that politics is considered to be the male domain and has no space for women in this field. They thought that the political field brought women in direct contact with strangers that negate Pukhtunwali. Therefore, their physical presence in public is not socially appreciated.

The apparent threats to honor curbs woman’s role in politics. The social, economic, and political empowerment of women is imagined as a challenge to men’s authority. So it is difficult to accept women in the superior or managerial role (Khan, A, 2007:05). Therefore, women find it difficult to play an active role in the public sphere. These challenges also favor male domination in different fields, including politics (Umer et al., 2016:149).

Naz et al(2012: 65 & 70) posit that Pukhtunwali and gender-segregated socio-cultural setup are perceived reasons behind the division of private and public spheres in Pukhtun society. These factors further increased the problem of gender discrimination in politics and political empowerment.

Religious extremism (Elashi, 2014: 01), honor boundedness, strict observance of Pardah (Orbala, 2012:02) societal attitudes, and cultural norms are the main hurdles for the Pukhtun female to be in politics (Naz et al., 2012: 65 & 70).

4.3 POLITICAL IMPEDIMENTS

The above-mentioned socio-cultural features of Pukhtun society indirectly affect women’s participation in politics. However, apart from these hurdles, there are some direct influences that hinder women’s role in politics. For example lack of social and economic power vis-à-vis men directly affects women’s political role.

Hanif considers that the economic dependence of women has an adverse effects on their decision–making powers in the family, community, and in political parties. Inaccessibility of economic resources further worsens women’s status and political leadership position (Hanif, 2009:26). Likewise, economic resources, possession of power, and political affiliations are crucial to be noticeable in the political arena. But the economic dependence and restricted mobility of women of patriarchal societies face difficulty to form mass political networking (Awan,2016:05). Hanif endorses the argument of Awan and adds that politics is a political process that needs public interaction. This interaction is possible through public appearances and mobility but cultural norms are against free mobility and mixed gathering of Pukhtun females with the general public (Hanif, 2009:26).

However, I posit that there are shreds of evidence of Pukhtun women who are considered to break the cultural obstacles and show their presence in the male-dominated political arena. Indeed, these women are from landowning, politically active families where women get more opportunities and training to assist their way into politics. Thus, women of politically eminent families become beneficial and find their way into politics. But the situation for the general women population is entirely different. Women in the general population are mainly powerless, their burden of excessive workload (household), lack of interest in the political affairs, unfavorable political situation, lack of confidence and experience in the political sphere also discourage these women to enter the arena of politics.

Iwanaga states that generally men in patriarchal societies contest elections as compared to female candidates. Thus lack of interest, opportunities, and nominal female involvement during
elections are the causes for their minimal presence in the political field. Likewise, lack of experience, resources, and self-esteem are the factors behind woman’s reluctance of contesting elections. So, biased beliefs and norms of males are responsible for creating such condition (Iwanaga, 2008: 125).

Similarly, Hanochi posits that marginal political activism and political involvement of women of patriarchal societies make them politically ignorant of their issues. She further adds that their lack of interest in public life is not because of their workload but they prefer domestic territories for themselves, which she claims, to be the main cause of their political backwardness. Hanochi argues that such behaviour contributes to the formation of two different spheres of activities, private and public. Women of the patriarchal societies actively perform private and domestic responsibilities while public activities as community leadership and politics are regarded as the domain of men (Hanochi, 2001: 114-115). Shvedova posits that such demeanour favoured men and thus political arena is manipulated by them. Men are behind the formulation of different rules for the political sphere. The presence of the men made political model further marginalized woman’s presence in the political sphere (Shvedova, 2005:34).

Mahmood posits that political empowerment of women is not an end in itself, but means to provoke the society for social and political empowerment which would further stimulate the overall development of society (Mahmood, 2004:151). Ali argues that violence against women, even in the political field is executed by males for the purpose to maintain their power and bolster the hierarchical structures. The very base of such a structure is the exploitation of marginalized groups. High-profile political assassinations and biased attitudes of the political parties against women are to deprive them of the decision-making processes. Similarly, inaccessibility of the funds for their constituencies and derogatory remarks also worsen troubles for women political figures (Ali, 2014).

Furthermore, women political figures perform their political functions within the boundaries directed by the political party leaders, party associates, voters, and the media as well (Rosenbluth et al, 2015:34). Similarly, political parties hesitate on part of women’s political participation because of their weak political activism and passive vote bank. So, political parties use women political participants for the representative functions at political meetings, mass gatherings, and political campaigns as well. Thus, women political wings in different political parties are for the purpose to perform these representative functions and have no authority in the decision-making processes within the political parties (Awan, 2016:3).

Mehdi is critical of the agendas presented by different political parties. He argues that the majority of the political parties have no agenda regarding the equality of women in politics. Their presence is taken for granted. In the electoral process, women on reserved seats increase their chances of success. Reserved seats though induct women in the political arena, yet, they are dependent on male colleagues and are acceptable as an extension of male political figures. Such an electoral system maintains the gender status quo instead of challenging it (Mehdi, 2015).

Similarly, an unfriendly political environment for women also creates problems for them. As it is not easy for women of the Pukhtun society to play their role in the political fields, women in rural areas are forbidden to cast their votes and attend the mass gatherings. Furthermore, the lives of those women who are better able to achieve the political positions are
still bound by their gender-related roles and status. Different factors bound women of these societies to their traditional functions and resist them to join the political field which is considered to be males’ domain. Richard argues that the patriarchal ideals are creating obstacles for women in the political field. Males of these areas consider them a threat to their dominance, in view of the fact that previously women in these areas have proved themselves in the male-dominated political field and had led campaigns on different occasions (Richard, 2010:236). Currently, the militancy further makes the lives of women vulnerable.

4.4 EXTREMISM AS AN OBSTACLE TO WOMEN’S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION
The social and political situation for Pukhtun women is already grim. It got further worsened with the increasing influence of the Taliban in these areas. The presence of the Taliban or their supporters in some areas is one of the largest threats to the empowerment of Pukhtun women. They have created an environment of terror by blasting the girls’ schools, kidnapping and torturing all those who try to defy their rules. Their terrorist activities have a deep impact on the lives of the general population. Such devastating actions make the lives of women more deplorable.

Unfortunately, the influence of the Taliban, especially in KP province poses a serious threat to the advancement and prosperity of women. Militants targeted different practices and actions which they considered to be against Islamic beliefs. Grigsby points out that their main targets were music, schools, and even government offices. Their target was not only females but males as well. Nevertheless, their dogmatic beliefs made the lives of women miserable as they opposed women’s involvement in the activities outside their homes whether education, political or social (Grigsby, 2014:96).

O’Malley in his UNESCO publication mentions that the Taliban oppose girls’ education. They have used mosques and illegal radio stations for the closure of all girls’ schools. They have threatened to blow up girls’ schools in KP. As in Afghanistan, those girls who are attending schools and ignored their threats were attacked with acid (O’Malley, 2010:79). Similarly, in Swat valley (district of KP), a young schoolgirl Malala Yousafzai was shot by Taliban gunmen who fortunately survived. Taliban claimed that she was explicitly advocating the girls’ education and defying a ban on female education which is why she was targeted by them. She got severe injuries on her head. She is still the staunch supporter of girls’ education who gained worldwide recognition. She became the young Noble Peace Prize laureate winner for her explicit stand for female education in a dreadful situation imposed by the Taliban (Hussain, 2013).

Thus, militants have not only destroyed thousands of girls’ schools but also threatened women to leave their jobs and force them to wear hijabs. The same threats were received by the KP woman politician Bushra Gohar (MNA), nonetheless, she is determined regarding her political career and did not bow in front of threats from the Taliban. She was adamant about continuing her political career and had no intentions of leaving politics. She defied the threats from the Taliban by confidently meeting her constituents and showing her physical presence publically (Najibullah & Wazir, 2011). Bushra Gohar is explicitly advocating the rights of women in the KP and the FATA region. She argues that bills regarding child marriage and domestic violence should have been passed by the KP Assembly (Nisa & Khan, 2016).
In the 2013 general elections, women party workers came out for campaigning and supporting their party’s candidates as well. Malik reveals in her interview that the Taliban had threatened ANP male candidates in Mardan, Swabi, Charsadda, and Peshawar. Then, women political workers of ANP led the political campaigns of their male party colleagues (Malik, interview, 2017).

Women candidates led election campaigns for themselves as well. They have visited almost every part of their constituencies to gain the support of the public despite Taliban threats. Likewise, women also came out for casting their votes in certain specific red zone areas for elections like Mardan. Similarly, women of the tribal areas were openly contesting elections in an uncertain situation. Badam Zari, from Bajour Agency (NA-44, Tribal area-IX) is the first woman who contested elections independently from FATA. She has confidently faced the uncertainty and militancy (Anwar& Ahmed, 2017:174)

Scholars argue that Taliban’s idiosyncratic perception regarding the religion Islam and their brutal punishments (beheadings, floggings, amputations and shootings) against the “culprits” publicly is for the purpose to terrorize people and to increase their power (Physicians for Human Rights Report, 1998: 32). Sinno posits that Taliban politicise Islam and justify their cruel attitudes in the name of religion. Majority of Pukhtuns are against such repressive acts of Taliban, who considered it against the true image of Islam. Taliban commit crimes in the name of Islam and politics. Islam is used by them for their legitimacy (Sinno, 2010:32). Malik endorses Sinno and postulates that though local Pukhtun culture is against the women empowerment in all fields, however, it was hijacked by the militant rhetoric. As mentioned earlier, Pukhtuns in the settled areas have educated their daughters and who show their active presence in the political processes as well (Malik, 2016:15).

Similarly, Zia argues that Taliban have also attacked the lady health workers and issued fatwas against such women. In different fatwas, Taliban term it the responsibility of Muslim men to kidnap such ladies and forcibly marry them. They even declare them as “fit for murder”. Thus, it was easy for Taliban to persuade Pukhtuns easily because of their affinity to their cultural values. They have even killed, murdered and kidnapped these women (Zia, 2013). In these situations of uncertainty, women public figures find it difficult to work openly. The situations for women political involvement further worsened by the orthodox thinking of the Pukhtun society. Despite their deplorable status in the society, yet women show their presence in the political field. There is observable presence of women in politics not only from those having kinship ties with prominent political families but from the general population as well.

CONCLUSION

Pakistani women and more specifically Pukhtun women are facing hindrances in different spheres of lives. Such obstacles impede their way to success and prosperity. Socio-economic, cultural, religious barriers are like the invisible chains in their feet. Beside contradictory norms and values represented by Pukhtunwali and Islam, they are interpreted in a manner to justify patriarchal behaviour and structures in Pukhtun society. Pukhtuns are followers of the religion Islam, but they also follow their centuries old codes of conduct Pukhtunwali, in which most of the features are against rights of the Pukhtun women. Being an Islamic society, Pukhtuns are still probing for an appropriate role of religion Islam in political and social life. They are
struggling to find boundaries between Islam and traditions. Such amalgamation of religion and culture further multiplies the consensus of the followers especially regarding the rights of women. Which in turn makes life of the women vulnerable and exposed to exploitation. Pukhtuns use their cultural codes to benefit males as compared to women of the society. Regardless of the fact, that there are precedents of the women who showed their resilience and carved out some political space, by large women are exploited in the name of Pukhtunwali and are subject to male dominance and control. However, some Pukhtun women dare to challenge these odds and resist control and subjugation. But still, hindrances are present which cannot be ignored and need to be tackled out sensibly.

References:


