

HINDRANCES IN THE WAY OF EDUCATION IN FATA: AN APPRAISAL

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Abstract

The main purpose of the paper is to highlight problems in the way of education in FATA. The standard of education in FATA has always been low and unsatisfactory. Since independence in 1947, succeeding governments have been paying no heed to the problems being faced by the people of FATA. Corrupt Maliks and politicians have joined hands to worsen the situation. With the onset of militancy and extremism, the situation has become worse. Hundreds of schools were destroyed due to terrorist activities. The worse security situation has put on stake the future of thousands of children. Here in this paper the scholar will attempt to explore the basic factors involved in the destabilization of education in FATA.

Key Words: FATA, Education, Militancy, Military, Maliks, Poverty

Introduction

Federally Administrated Tribal Areas of Pakistan (FATA) is made of seven Tribal Agencies and six adjacent Frontier Regions. The Governor of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is exercising administrative authority over the area. The 1973 constitution deals with the Tribal Areas under article 246 and 247. ¹British engagement with the region began in 1849, after the annexation of Punjab. The current legal and geopolitical position of FATA can only be understood from its colonial past as a “frontier” region for the British Raj, understood at the time as a “wide tract of border country, hinterlands, or a buffer state”. Afghanistan’s birth as a buffer state between the expanding powers of Russia and Britain was ushered in by the Durand Line Agreement of 1893 and the Pamir Boundary Agreement of 1895. The former was an agreement between an Afghan King and the British recognizing what Pakistan today claims is the international boundary with Afghanistan. The latter was an agreement between the British and the Russians that demarcated Afghanistan’s northern border.²

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The FCR (Frontier Crimes Regulations) were crafted by Lord Curzon to create some semblance of codified law to govern the tribal area. The act gives the federal government the right to appoint a “Political Agent” (PA) for each of the agencies in FATA. The PA is invested with considerable magisterial, administrative, revenue, executive and development powers in the Agencies. They have the authority to decide any matter, civil or criminal, or refer it to a *jirga*, or assembly of tribal men (which the PA, of course, convenes). Upon independence in 1947, Pakistan adopted the FCR, and continued the policy of except FATA from the normal rule of law.³ Current Pashtun politics centres around the religious content of their national identity, but equally on their love for weapons, lack of education, poverty and lack of modern political structures. Both religious content and ease with weapons were encouraged and exaggerated during the years of Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. During that era the Pashtun territories became an active theatre for the East-West global conflict.⁴ The geopolitical nexus of Pakistan-FATA-Afghanistan-India must be seen as a regional crisis that requires a holistic politico-military approach. But suspicions and disinformation about each other's motives, replete with conspiracy theories, have combined to make Pakistan, the Muslim world's only nuclear power, the most dangerous place in the world.⁵

FATA is one of the most underdeveloped regions of Pakistan. Its people are poorly educated, lack access to adequate health care, and deprived of basic facilities such as sanitation and potable water. The vast majority of the population resides in rural areas, where the economy is based on agriculture and the subsistence level use of natural resources. Here, infrastructure meanwhile is thin on the ground, not only affecting commerce and industry but also deprived of the population of access to health care and education.⁶

Socio-Cultural Factors

Socio-cultural factors have influenced education in FATA. Among these are early marriages, culture taboos and tribal enmities that make travel unsafe. A number of customs such as child marriage is still present in FATA. In some places parents decide upon the future marriage of their children even before they have reached youth or sometimes even before they are born. Due to this they start earning in early life and for this purpose they leave their homes. Similarly, females get only primary education and due to early marriages their dream of getting higher education is not fulfilled.⁷ *Purdah* (veils) is also another socio-cultural factor that affects the education of females. The status and role of Pashtun society is traditional one. Pashtuns society has its own rules and code of honour in which women are considered as the symbol of that honour. A Pashto is not only a language but also a code of life called *pakhtunwali*. *Paurdha* is also included in the code of *pakhtunwali* and one who does not observe *purdah* is out of *pakhtunwali*. Usually in FATA the people are not sending their daughters for education by arguing that when she goes to school, she cannot observe *purdah*. They are also afraid of the danger that their daughters may bring a bad name for

her family.⁸ Most shocking to the West was the Taliban's treatment of women. When the Taliban took Kabul, they immediately forbade girls to go to school. Moreover, women were barred from working outside the home, precipitating a crisis in healthcare and education. Women were also prohibited from leaving their home without a male relative.⁹

During their five years of rule, the Taliban regime imposed a strict interpretation of *Sharia* (Islamic law). In order to root out non-Islamic influence, the regime banned “frivolous” activities like music, kite flying, television, and the Internet. Female education became forbidden. Not only were women allowed to work only at home, they could not step out of the house without the company of a male.¹⁰ Women almost completely disappear from public view, and the area is conspicuous by a near complete lack of women’s educational institutions. The few institutions for women’s education are often poorly attended. In many parts of FATA after 9/11 these activities were started which effected female education.¹¹

Poverty

The FATA and frontier regions have been particularly receptive to this radicalization process because of a history of poverty and underdevelopment.¹² FATA is an extremely poor area by any comparison. “There are few livelihood opportunities available to the people. The local economy is chiefly pastoral, with agriculture practiced in a few fertile valleys. Most households are engaged in primary-level activities such as subsistence agriculture and livestock rearing, or small-scale business conducted locally.” A telling statistic for FATA is that the population of around 3.5 million has so little arable land that each acre of cultivable land has to be utilized for supporting at least 40 people. In the absence of viable options to earn a living, the lure of illicit activities such as smuggling (of consumer goods and weapons) and drug trafficking is as difficult to resist as the call of extremist Islamist elements. Poverty in the tribal areas is high compared to the rest of Pakistan. The results of a recent participatory assessment, meanwhile, reveal the existence of a nuanced system of determining social status, involving more than a dozen classifications for poverty including *miskeen* (meek), *aajiz* (needy), *ghareeb* (poor), *faqeer* (beggar), *bechara* (pitiable), *spera* (hungry or unfortunate), *tabah-o-barbad* (destroyed), *khwaar* (frustrated) and *bebakht* (unlucky).” It is indeed an ironic state of affairs, since the preceding information is an official version of the socio-economic indicators, provided on the Government of Pakistan’s FATA website.¹³

The vast majority of Pakistanis struggle daily with poverty, high unemployment, lack of education, and inadequate healthcare. Without savings, insurance, or social safety nets, the shock of a death, injury or destroyed home can dramatically alter families’ lives. In FATA, underdevelopment and poverty are particularly stark.¹⁴

Increasingly poverty is being caused by conflict and unemployment is making people in FATA vulnerable to recruitment. According to a local expert cited in the report, recruitment on ideological grounds is rare and most recruits join because of economic and political marginalization. Like the Afghan Taliban, the Pakistani Taliban offer salaries to participants.¹⁵ Because of the poverty of the people and a high rate of illiteracy, this area has been a recruitment base for the militants.¹⁶

For both boys and girls factors that deter primary enrolment and discourage continuation into secondary schooling including poverty, the perceived low economic impact of schooling and an insufficient number of schools where they are most needed. Poverty also affects girls more severely, since poorer families who may be able to invest in some education for their children will invariably award priority to sons. As a result few young women progress to the point where they are able to pursue higher education.¹⁷

The limited opportunity for education in Pakistan is a significant indicator of the need for human resources development.¹⁸ Only 17 percent of the overall population is literate. Among women, meanwhile, literacy is as low as 3 per cent. FATA has large number of small schools, some accommodating as few as 65 students, and most with an average of between one and three teachers. Official data is suspect, however, since many schools buildings are used for other purposes, including running business and many teachers collect their salaries but do not report to work. Teaching techniques are traditional and corporal punishment is common. Less than 40 per cent of all children are enrolled in education from the primary to higher secondary level but just 21 percent of all girls are in school. While overall enrolment is low, drop-out rates are high, with more than half of all children who begin primary school leaving before they complete class V.¹⁹

Pakistan cannot begin to address its economic and social needs – as well as move solidly towards political stability - until it first addresses the dire state of the existing educational sector. Pakistan is one of the only countries in the world where the number of illiterates is rising. Some 6.8 million of its children are out of school and only 16.8% of Pakistanis have a secondary education. Worse, Pakistan does not have an adequate base of merit-based education or employment. Corruption and nepotism in hiring is an every-day phenomenon and large disparities continue to exist between provinces and communities on the basis of political, communal and ethnic biases.²⁰

Military Operation

The September 11, 2001, attack by Al-Qaeda on the United States drew the U.S back to the region, this time to invade Afghanistan and oust the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. Although Pakistan had recognized the Taliban government, now, under political and military pressure, its military ruler, General Pervez Musharraf, suddenly switched sides to become a U.S ally. Musharraf offered the U.S

logistical assistance in its attack on Afghanistan and promised to move Pakistani troops into the border region to help seal it so the U.S. and its allies could deal with the Taliban expeditiously, a near-impossible task under the best of circumstances. This put him at odds with Al-Qaeda and the locally established Islamic groups in the FATA and the North West Frontier Province. Initially the Pakistan Army was deployed in FATA but did not conduct aggressive operations, relying more on attempts to dominate the space by its presence, or through deals with local leaders. Government asked to local warlords try to quell any disturbance in FATA.²¹ Militancy in Pakistan suffered a public relations disaster during the TTP's reign in the wider Swat region. The resulting sea change in public opinion toward the Pakistani Taliban gave the Pakistani military the opportunity it needed to conduct a comprehensive campaign against the militants in Swat and win. The military's morale was further sustained after this success in Swat and by the killing of Beitullah Mehsud in a drone attack in August 2009. Such momentum bolstered support for another broad operation into South Waziristan, the TTP's home territory.²²

A lot of these strikes have been in the FATA going after al-Qaeda suspects.²³ Another adverse impact of the military operations was the depriving of children, both boys and girls, from the right to education. Educational institutions in general and girls schools in particular were attacked, bombed and destroyed by insurgents. Taliban were responsible for the destruction of 120 girls and 80 other schools in Swat Valley alone. The terrorist and counter-terrorist attacks in the tribal areas have badly hampered the educational system in a part of the country which was already suffering from low literacy rate. Female education has suffered most as girls are not allowed by the militants to attend schools and colleges.²⁴

The Role of *Maliks*

The legitimacy of tribal structures has been a long-standing problem. Many *Maliks* (Tribal Chiefs) are enjoying defacto powers.²⁵ The British colonial administrators of India tried to control them by various methods; proxy wars, installation of 'friendly' governments and direct intervention. Failed attempts at direct rule encouraged the British to introduce the Sandman system, whose effect was the raising of tribal levies, or *Khasadars*, which institution survives even today. It consisted of ruling this unruly area by building roads and infrastructure with the help of local *Maliks*, who could control the loyalties of the tribes. In return, *Maliks* got large grants and subsidies. The British issued a new Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR) in 1901, replacing the earlier generation of laws. A typical colonial device of vesting the executive with judicial powers was introduced to enable the former to be an absolutist source of power in the area. The FCR is a set of draconian laws more in tune with medieval times than the 21st century. "The most notorious sections of the regulations are 21-24 that deal with the issue of collective territorial responsibility. These are particularly problematic clauses which have empowered the political agent— the principal

representative of the federal government in a tribal district—to punish an entire tribe or clan for crimes committed on its territory by imposing fines, arresting individuals, seizing and even demolishing property anywhere in the country.”²⁶

The *Malik* system is the basic factor which plays a vital role in depriving the common people of education. Before the advent of Taliban, *Maliks* were the sole power of the tribal belt. This minute group was utilizing all facilities provided by the government and political authority for their self-interest. Every *Malik* had been given a primary or middle school which he used it as his drawing room and there was no one who could challenge his authority or misuse of a common thing as he was fully supported by the political authority of the respective agency.²⁷

They do not want other people to get knowledge because as he knew, educated people could challenge his authority and unlimited powers and can resist him to exploit common people. Thus *Maliks* were the main hurdle in the way of education. However, most of these schools exist “on paper,” not in the physical sense. The number of students enrolled in these institutions is 607,004, with 405,602 boys and 201,402 girls. A handful of the “ghosts’ school” are buildings where tribal *Maliks* have their personal *hujras* or use them for business centres. There are even some buildings where they keep their animals.²⁸ The territory of FATA does not have the equivalent of police, and law and order has mainly been guaranteed by the tribal chiefs relying on the help of loosely constituted tribal militias. However, in the current scenario, the drone attacks have caused a number of casualties without the tribal chiefs or the Pakistani government being able to protect civilians.²⁹ Public schools in FATA are built primarily on tribally owned rather than government land. The government enters into contracts with the tribe that owns the property, typically involving emoluments whereby members of the tribe are guaranteed employment as guards, office assistants and cleaners, evoking notions of a school being the tribe’s turf. *Madrasas* take advantage of the ensuing vacuum, offering students basic literacy at little or no cost. Boys’ schools have also become venues for *jihadi* preaching, receiving frequent visits from militants. Poor education leaves residents with few skills or economic prospects, furthering their dependence on tribal leaders or pushing them into the arms of militants.³⁰

Lack of Basic Infrastructure

The government’s Annual School Census Report on Educational Institutions for 2008-09 says that 1,015 primary schools in FATA, 87 of them for girls, have no boundary walls; 1,316 boys’ schools and 583 girls’ schools have no drinking-water facilities; and 1,555 boys’ schools and 454 girls’ schools have no electricity while 1,453 boys’ and 344 girls’ schools have no toilets.³¹ This situation explains the overall low enrolment and high dropout rate in FATA’s schools. In this state of affairs, few parents would want their children to go to school.³² Besides lack of basic facilities like desks and fans in the classrooms, drinking water and latrines, lack of transportation for students to and from school,

and teachers' absenteeism, there is the matter of unaffordable tuition fees and this despite the abysmal teaching standards. Non-availability of separate schooling arrangements for girls is another important issue. Hostel facilities for girls are nonexistent. Besides, poverty, inconvenient locations of schools and lack of extra-curricular activities make schooling less appealing for children.³³

Today FATA remains the poorest region in Pakistan, with some 97 percent of its 3.2 million inhabitants living in rural areas and 60 per cent falling below the poverty line. The literacy rate there is only about 17 per cent, compared to the national average of about 50 per cent. Access to healthcare and clean drinking water is limited, even by generally low national standards. Publicly funded education is virtually non-existent. Due to the ruggedness of the terrain and lack of irrigation and other infrastructure, crop yields are low and the region is not self-sufficient in food.³⁴ With no accountability system in place, a large number of schoolteachers turn up only to collect their salaries. Needless to say, there is no proper way of assessing, evaluating and monitoring the performance of the teaching staff. There are 5625 Government Educational institutes in Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) in which 4442 are functional (2614 boys + 1828 girls), 1064 are non-functional (578 boys + 486 girls) and 119 are closed.³⁵ There is intense political interference in the matter of transfers, postings and appointments of staff. Meanwhile, scholarships are disbursed through the political agent, and he is at liberty to award those scholarships to anyone he favors. The reason for teachers' absenteeism has largely been non-payment of their salaries. The education department in the FATA Secretariat has failed to pay out salaries to teachers for months now, which forces them to quit their jobs and look for some other means of livelihood.³⁶

Militancy

Militancy and conflict have also seriously undermined education in FATA. Large-scale displacement in the area has left tens of thousands of children without schools. Countless boys' and girls' schools have either been destroyed or threatened by militants. In many tribal districts, female students have stopped attending classes altogether. In 2005 the group re-emerged under the leadership of Mullah Fazlullah, albeit with a more radical edge, strengthened by militants fleeing drone attacks in the tribal areas. With its populist rhetoric, swift justice and opposition to the old feudal elite, the movement found favour with the under classes and the disaffected youths. It also attracted petty criminals who were soon terrorizing rivals and ordinary people alike. The insurgents banned female education and bombed schools.³⁷

Militant movements in Waziristan, FATA and elsewhere, the Pakistani government appeared as a credible competitor for the loyalties of the population in tribal regions.³⁸ In Bajaur, by mid-2008 all girls' schools were either destroyed or closed. In North and South Waziristan, 180 girls' community schools, established with international assistance, were forced shut. In Orakzai agency, Shia schools have been the direct target of sectarian attacks. Schools have also

been turned into bases for both the army and extremist groups. Returning families often see their children's schools occupied by soldiers. Yet violence has by no means stifled education in FATA altogether, and there remain opportunities for meaningful intervention. Thousands of schools remain functional with students still attending classes. By end-2008, there were 4,664 primary schools, including roughly 2,000 girls' schools, with the student-to-teacher ratio actually lower in FATA than in other parts of Pakistan. But literacy figures are still well below the national average.³⁹

Pakistan deployed its troops in the tribal belt after the US invasion of Afghanistan so that Taliban could not make sanctuaries in that area. Wana was the first place where the military operation was launched by the Pakistan Army against militants, and the strategy was followed in South Waziristan Agency in 2004. Afterwards, a series of different operations were carried out against militants in all the seven agencies of FATA, which spread from Bajaur in North to South Waziristan Agency (SWA) in the south. The conflict gained momentum in 2008 when militants spread their activities based in North Waziristan to other agencies of the FATA. However, the people of FATA are the ones who bear the brunt of the conflict in the region. These people are in the direct firing range of ruthless and cold blooded extremists and militants. The militants have brutally slaughtered hundreds of people besides killing thousands of them. Even women and children are not safe. Schools are blown up and tribal elders are indiscriminately targeted. Also, militants have forced people to leave their homes. Pakistan's efforts to stabilize the situation cannot be undermined. The State initially tried to limit the activities of the militants, through a process of talks and negotiations. This however could not succeed and therefore prompted the government to use force. After these attempts failed, a military operation was launched in early 2009 with the consensus of the political, administrative and military leadership. This operation caused an internal migration in colossal proportions from the embattled areas; an estimated two million people became internally displaced as a result of crisis.⁴⁰ While the operation is seen as well-intentioned, it has imposed an immense cost on the local economy. Large numbers of people have been forced to leave their homes and livelihoods and considerable damage has been caused to physical and social infrastructure, particularly educational institutions. However, another reason for their policy of destroying educational institutions stems from the fact that in many areas, these institutions are being used by security forces as their camps, thus making them prime target of the militants. Educational institutions and the people directly or indirectly associated with them were the most to suffer. Nonetheless, there are striking facts and figures available on the number of destroyed educational institutions for boys and girls(primary schools, middle schools, high schools and colleges).Due to militancy about 500 schools were destroyed.⁴¹ In Bajaur agency 95, Mohmand Agency 88, Khyber 58, Kurram 61, Orakzai 34, North Waziristan 32, South Waziristan 35, FR Peshawar 15, FR Kohat 32, FR Tank 4, FR Lakki 4.⁴²

The Way Forward

There is need for developing consensus among the major political parties and some other stake-holders in the FATA, for the solution of important issues. They should be convinced that allowing political parties, their organizations in the region will provide the masses alternatives to the dominance of mullahs, who in the absence of political representation and leadership control the population through mosque and pulpit. It would also allow the region to develop a new generation of political leaders and reduce the impact of the hereditary tribal elders who currently dominate politics in the FATA.

Tribal areas should be fully integrated in Pakistan. In this way they get judicial, political, economic, facilities. It will bring drastic changes in the governance of the tribal regions. They should also be provided a huge package to change their lifestyle specially reduction of poverty.⁴³ Further the following step should be taken:

- Reconstruction of destroyed schools.
- Government measures to ensure teachers attendance and merit based appointments.
- The role of the *maliks* must be reduced.
- Encouragement of female education.
- Strict security measures for schools and colleges.
- Government should introduce political reforms in FATA.

Conclusion

Education in FATA is facing a chain of crisis. There are no facilities like the rest of the cities in Pakistan. However, situation reveals that in some Agencies the ratio is much above the threshold level, while in other Agencies/FRs it is below the specified standard. To be more specific in Bajaur Agency teacher student ratio is 1:80 in Girls and 1:73 in Boys: having combined ratio of 1:74. On the other hand in South Waziristan Agency ratio of Girls is 1:14 and for Boys is 1:12: having combined ratio of 1:12. Therefore mentioned disparity needs our urgent focus and must be rectified. To control the falling standard of education, government should introduce reforms in FATA.

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