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Examining the Role of Women-Jirga in Mitigating Cultural Challenges Faced by Women: A Case Study of Khwendo-Jirga in Swat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan Since 2013

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Abstract

In patriarchal societies, women have long faced dehumanization and victimization in areas such as education, healthcare, employment, and marriage, leading to deep cultural challenges. This research explores how women in Swat, Pakistan, established the Khwendo-Jirga (Sister's Council) to challenge these cultural norms and secure their rights. By leveraging the existing power structures, these women created a platform to address the cultural challenges faced by others, challenging male-dominated discourses. The study employs qualitative content analysis based on interviews with Khwendo-Jirga activists and women who benefited from its decisions, alongside a review of secondary sources. It investigates the formation of the Khwendo-Jirga, the challenges it encountered, and its broader role in feminist discourse, particularly within Swat. The paper emphasizes the need for further research to amplify the voices of Pashtun women, whose struggles for agency and empowerment have often been overlooked.

Key Words: Women's Jirga, Sisters' Council, Women Empowerment, Feminist Discourses in Pakistan, Feminism in Swat, Women's Agency in Swat

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Abstract

In patriarchal societies, women have long faced dehumanization and victimization in areas such as education, healthcare, employment, and marriage, leading to deep cultural challenges. This research explores how women in Swat, Pakistan, established the Khwendo-Jirga (Sister's Council) to challenge these cultural norms and secure their rights. By leveraging the existing power structures, these women created a platform to address the cultural challenges faced by others, challenging male-dominated discourses. The study employs qualitative content analysis based on interviews with Khwendo-Jirga activists and women who benefited from its decisions, alongside a review of secondary sources. It investigates the formation of the Khwendo-Jirga, the challenges it encountered, and its broader role in feminist discourse, particularly within Swat. The paper emphasizes the need for further research to amplify the voices of Pashtun women, whose struggles for agency and empowerment have often been overlooked.

Keywords: [Women's Jirga](#), [Sisters' Council](#), [Women Empowerment](#), [Feminist Discourses in Pakistan](#), [Feminism in Swat](#), [Women's Agency in Swat](#)

Introduction

In rural Pakistan, particularly in Swat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, men are regarded as dominant figures. Disputes involving Zar, Zan, and Zameen (Money, Women, and Property) are traditionally resolved through a tribal council known as the Jirga, based on principles of informal justice. This system

is exclusively male-dominated, with women barred from participation, even when they are the victims. Occasionally, male relatives represent women's interests, but decisions are made without consulting them directly (Khattak, 2018). As a result, women endure harsh treatment and suffer from human rights violations (Baloch, 2018).



Until 2012, the Jirga system in Swat was entirely controlled by men. However, a courageous group of women activists challenged this biased and brutal system, which had perpetuated practices such as rape, honor killings, and the exchange of girls to settle disputes (Brohi, 2016). These women formed local organizations to challenge the cultural challenges enforced by patriarchy and offer legal assistance to women dealing with domestic violence and similar issues. (Khan, 2017).

This initiative is part of a broader movement. Activist women, not only in Pakistan but across various regions, have resisted the oppressive patriarchal system and have spearheaded women's movements in Asia and North Africa. In Nepal, for instance, women from political parties, NGOs, and Maoist factions challenged the elite power dynamics, sparking the women's movement in 2009 (Tamang, 2009). In Sri Lanka, feminist peace activism focuses on the struggles of internally displaced women, female-headed households, and war widows (De Alwis, 2009).

Historically, the princely state of Swat had a renowned judicial system in the 17th century. However, after Swat's integration into Pakistan in 1969, marginalized groups, including women, struggled to access justice (Adnan, 2020). This study examines the case study of Khwendo-Jirga, established by Tabassum Adnan in 2012 in Swat, as a platform for empowering voiceless women in Pashtun society.

Aim of the Research

This study seeks to examine the formation and development of Khwendo-Jirga (Sister's Council) in Swat, Pakistan, focusing on the role of local women activists in its establishment. It aims to explore how these women address the challenges faced by marginalized women in Swat, particularly in a patriarchal society. The research will also analyze the physical and psychological obstacles these activists encounter while advocating for women's rights, with a focus on their ability to resolve issues that traditional male Jirgas have been unable to address.

Problem Statement

The patriarchal norms and entrenched gender discrimination in Swat have long marginalized women, making it difficult for male-led Jirgas to

effectively address women's issues. Khwendo-Jirga, led by female activists, presents a unique and nuanced approach to resolving these problems. This study aims to investigate how these women challenge patriarchal structures, support vulnerable women, and navigate the obstacles they face while working in the field. The research will also explore the broader implications of their contributions to understanding women's empowerment in Swat, a subject often overlooked in academic literature.

Research Question

In a patriarchal society like Swat, even male Jirga activists struggle to address women's issues adequately. This paper's primary research question is: How do the women activists of Khwendo-Jirga address and overcome the cultural challenges experienced by women in the patriarchal society of Swat?

Supplementary Research Questions

1. How was Khwendo-Jirga established?
2. What role do women activists play in addressing the issues faced by females in Swat Valley?
3. What types of problems are tackled by the women activists of Khwendo-Jirga?
4. What challenges do these female activists encounter while working in the field?
5. What is the perception of women activists' roles within Swat Valley??
6. How is the contribution of these activist women addressed within the wider feminist discourse in Pakistan?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant as it represents the first academic exploration of the women's Jirga system in the Swat District. By leveraging the researcher's native background and Pashto language skills, this research gains unique access to the chairperson of Khwendo-Jirga, other female activists, and victim interviewees, enabling in-depth data collection and interviews. The study aims to enhance the existing literature on gender studies by providing fieldwork insights into how Khwendo-Jirga addresses cultural challenges imposed by patriarchy in Swat. It will contribute to key debates on feminism in Pakistan and offer a nuanced understanding of women's

empowerment, both in Pakistan generally and in Swat District (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) specifically.

Research Methodology:

Research Technique

This study employs the "Case Study" research technique to develop a comprehensive understanding of gender discrimination within the patriarchal society of Swat. By examining the specific case of Swat, this technique aims to identify key issues related to women's subjugation and how certain courageous women in the region have challenged existing patriarchal discourses.

Data Collection

Primary data for this research have been gathered through fieldwork interviews with key informants.

Fieldwork

The fieldwork entailed conducting four open-ended, semi-structured interviews with female activists from Khwendo-Jirga to collect in-depth information. The interviews featured Khwendo-Jirga's founder, Tabassum Adnan; Pakistani women's rights advocate, Hadiqa Bashir; and two women who had been rehabilitated by Khwendo-Jirga. Victim samples have been selected using a snowball sampling technique. To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms are used for the two victims following the QAU Research Ethics Policy.

Language

Interviews were conducted in Pashto to prevent any distortion of responses that might arise from using a non-native language.

Desk Study

Secondary data were gathered through desk research, which included reviewing sources such as magazines, reports on women's rights, books, research papers, journals, and online documents.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is conducted using the "Qualitative Content Analysis" method, which involves systematically describing the meaning of texts, identifying patterns, and categorizing them into themes. This approach allows for a structured

presentation and interpretation of themes to address the research questions (Schreier, [2013](#)).

Limitations of the Study

This study acknowledges certain limitations, including the relatively small sample size, which may affect the breadth of the findings. Due to logistical constraints, extensive fieldwork was not feasible; however, the qualitative data collection method provided valuable insights into the lived experiences of the interviewees, contributing to a broader understanding of the key issues facing women in Swat.

Additionally, the sensitivity of the topic impacted the availability of research subjects, as many were hesitant to participate in face-to-face interviews. The decision to avoid email, telephone, MSN Messenger, or Skype interviews was intentional, as in-person interactions allowed for the observation of social cues and body language, enriching the data beyond verbal responses. Despite these limitations, focusing on a smaller group of participants enabled a more concentrated analysis of the chosen issues, leading to a sharper interpretation of the data.

Literature Review:

Historical and Political Context of Swat

The region of Swat has faced several foreign invasions and significant historical changes. A large population of Swat converted to Islam in the 8th century AD. The Pukhtoon tribe of Yousafzai began to intrude on Swat in the 14th century, gaining political control by displacing the native population. In 1849, the Islamic State of Swat was established. Main Gul Abdul Wadud was appointed as the Wali of Swat by the local Jirga in 1917. Although his rule was autocratic, he co-opted the religious and landlord communities (Khalid Aziz and Helge Luras, [2010](#)). The region was politically and economically linked to British India and later to Pakistan. In 1969, Pakistan annexed Swat, but ineffective integration led to unrest starting in the 1990s (Khalid Aziz and Helge Luras, [2010](#)).

Militancy and the Rise of the Taliban

Maulana Sufi Mohammad established the Tanzeem Nifaz Shariat-e-Mohammadi (TNSM) in 1990, challenging the state's authority and aiming to

impose Sharia in Swat. His son-in-law, Maulana Fazlullah, led the TNSM with a more radical Taliban brand of Islam. Sufi Mohammad's era was relatively moderate compared to his successor; girls' education was not banned, and there was no attack on musicians and dancers (Khalid Aziz and Helge Luras, [2010](#)).

Cultural and Social Issues

The causes of militancy in Swat are multifaceted, including social, political, geopolitical, and economic factors. The Taliban's agenda resonated with historical and cultural elements of resistance and religious revival in Swat. A study found that 83% of respondents were influenced by religious personalities, 67% believed in a connection between religious education and militancy, and 78% felt the Pakistani government's alliance with the U.S. in the "war on terror" encouraged support for militants (Khalid Aziz and Helge Luras, [2010](#)). After a series of talks, dialogues, and partial military actions between the government and the Taliban of Swat, the region was finally cleared of militants after a full-scale military operation by Pakistan. Thousands of people had to be displaced, many people got killed at the hands of the Taliban and the women of Swat who were already marginalized had to suffer a lot.

Impact on Women and Cultural Practices

From 2007-2009, militants targeted cultural practices, including musicians and dancers. Prominent figures such as singer Sardar Yousafzai and dancer Shabana suffered violent attacks, and many artists were forced to leave the valley or turn to prostitution due to financial hardships (Buneri, [2011](#)).

Patriarchy and Women's Subordination

Patriarchy and women's subordination are pervasive in Pakistan, with even more exploitation in Pashtun culture. Pashtuns justify their treatment of women by referencing Islam, though Islamic teachings are more egalitarian (Siddiqi, [2008](#)). Pashtunwali practices deny women inheritance, isolate them, and discourage divorce despite mistreatment. Local proverbs reflect a masculine perspective: "Women belong in the house, or in the grave" and "If women had no noses, they would eat

shit" (Nasreen Akhtar and Daniel A. Metraux, [2013](#)).

Historical Context of Swat's Cultural Adaptation

Swat Valley has traditionally been more adaptable than other conservative Pashtun regions. It was once home to the Hinayana sect of Buddhism and a center of Himalayan civilization. The Yousafzai Pashtuns' conquest in the 14th century preserved various cultural practices, including those of Buddhist, Hindu, and Sikh origins. The Yousafzai Pashtuns were accommodating and influenced by Buddhist traditions, which contrasted with the destruction seen in neighboring Afghanistan (Buneri, [2011](#)).

Legal and Human Rights Framework

Violence against women is prevalent in Pakistan, with cases of rape, murder, torture, and forced marriages widely reported. Despite Pakistan's signatory status to international human rights charters and UN conventions on women's rights, these are often poorly implemented. General Ayyub's Family Laws, General Zia's Hudood Ordinances, and other conservative measures have adversely affected women (Rosenthal, [1965](#)).

Literature on Crimes Against Women

Literature on crimes against women is divided into universalistic and particularistic approaches. The universalistic perspective views crimes as rooted in global patriarchal structures, while the particularistic approach focuses on individual perpetrators. A combined approach is necessary to understand violence against women within specific societal contexts (Chaudhary, [2014](#)).

Role of Khwendo-Jirga

Khwendo-Jirga, founded in 2012 by Tabassum Adnan, represents an effort to challenge traditional male-dominated Jirgas and advocate for women's rights in Swat. This Women's Council has successfully raised awareness of women's rights and assisted marginalized women in Swat (Kureshi, [2015](#)). While debates continue on whether Khwendo-Jirga constitutes a women's movement or part of a larger campaign, its focus on subverting traditional practices and advocating for women's rights remains significant.

Theoretical Framework

Paradigm/Conceptual Framework

This study uses the Interpretivist conceptual framework, which adopts an ontological stance that views realities as socially constructed rather than existing independently of human interpretations. As a result, realities are seen as multiple and relative, influenced by the contexts in which they occur. The interpretivist paradigm is chosen because patriarchy is a socially constructed phenomenon that differs across various places, societies, and countries. Similarly, women's activism is also context-dependent and its reality is not fixed; it may be supported in some areas while opposed in others.

The epistemological position of this research asserts that there is a relationship and interdependence between the knower (the researcher) and the known (Khwendo-Jirga). As a native of Swat, this study acknowledges that the researcher cannot study Khwendo-Jirga without influencing it or being influenced by it.

The methodology adopted for this research involves qualitative data collection techniques to provide an in-depth analysis of the role of activist women in Khwendo-Jirga and their efforts to address cultural challenges in the patriarchal society of Swat.

Research Type

This study utilizes descriptive research to outline the factors that motivated courageous activist women in Swat to establish Khwendo-Jirga, a separate Jirga for oppressed women in a society where only males previously formed Jirgas. Additionally, explanatory research is employed to elucidate how Khwendo-Jirga is addressing various issues faced by women in Swat.

Deductive Research

Given the presence of numerous competing theories on feminism in academic literature, this research applies a deductive approach. It examines broad concepts and trends from liberal reformist or mainstream feminism through new empirical data gathered from fieldwork, while deliberately avoiding any biases or preconceived notions.

Theory

This study is based on the theoretical framework of Liberal Reformist or Mainstream Feminism, which focuses on attaining gender equality through legal and political reforms within a liberal democratic system (Sparague, 2005). Khwendo-Jirga supports the realization of women's constitutional rights in a patriarchal society through legal and constitutional approaches. As Swat is now part of a democratic nation where legal equality is upheld, there is a need for platforms like Khwendo-Jirga to advance democratic rights for women within the traditional society of Swat (Bashir, [2020](#)).

Data Analysis

After collecting primary data, the raw data was deconstructed into codes. By adjusting the coding framework, the meaning of the text was understood. Different themes were assigned to order, and similar codes were compiled under one heading. The most important and relevant themes were then reconstructed and organized to address the research question. The following themes emerged and are displayed as follows:

Formation & Background

Tabassum Adnan established the first-ever female Jirga in Swat. During an interview, she mentioned that initially, there was no intention to create a Jirga. After enduring 20 years of domestic violence, she found the courage to seek Khula.

Upon this, my parents stopped terms with me as according to them I had brought shame to the family by defying the cultural norms. My husband took my four kids away. I felt that maybe it is a crime to go against the violence committed by husbands because Pashtun Society discourages divorce whatever toxicity and even brutality a woman has to face (Adnan, [2020](#)).

She joined a local non-governmental organization Shirkat-Gah (Sedeque, [1975](#)) to earn herself a living. There she used to resolve small issues like domestic quarrels and were advising them to stop discord and promote peace. But once an incident occurred after which a woman came to that local organization and asked them:

"How can a parent forgive that merciless cruel Husband who has thrown so much acid on his young

wife that 70% of the body has been burnt? Her intestine and other internal organs could be seen. And from the pain of which that burnt girl died in front of her parents". (Adnan, 2020)

Adnan raised a voice against the crime and compelled the concerned authorities to act against the perpetrator of the crime, but he was later released. She asked Chairperson Swat Qaumi Aman Jirga Ahmad Shah to provide justice to the poor parents. But that male Jirga ignored her. Upon this, she asked:

"If you can use me for Nanavati and Swara (traditions for peace resolution in Pashtun society) in the Jirga System, then why can't you listen to our issues? It is only because we are women. What if the same had been done by a woman to a man, would you ignore the matter like this? (Adnan, 2020)"

After facing rejection and ignoring from various quarters, Adnan gathered the resolve to establish a new platform. She successfully compelled the perpetrator to provide Diyat as compensation, which led to the formation of a platform dedicated to addressing women's issues. In 2011, this platform began advocating for the voiceless, and in 2012, it was officially named "Khwendo-Jirga" through media announcement. Spogmai (a pseudonym for one of the victims interviewed) stated:

"Now we don't need male Jirgas to resolve our issues. Women can solve their issues by themselves even better than male Jirgas are doing" (Spogmai, 2020).

Cultural Challenges Tackled by Women Activists

According to an interview with activist Hadiqa Bashir, the Khwendo-Jirga platform currently addresses a wide range of women's issues, including inheritance disputes, human trafficking, rape cases, cases of murder by in-laws, forced marriages, child marriages, Swara cases, Nanavati cases, dowry issues, acid attacks, and cases involving prostitutes, dancing girls, and transgender rights (Bashir, 2020).

The activists tackle these cultural challenges by organizing themselves into 25 groups covering both Upper and Lower Swat. Each group, led by a female activist, manages local issues independently while documenting more complex cases. At the end of each month, all 25 activists convene for a combined

meeting presided over by Tabassum Adnan. They discuss complex problems during these meetings. Adnan, as the first female member of the Dispute Resolution Council at the District Swat Level, also holds weekly meetings with the activists (Niaz, 2020). Some disputes are resolved by the activists directly, while others are referred to the Civil-Military Liaison Conference for resolution. The remaining issues are directed to the judiciary to secure free legal assistance for those who cannot afford costly lawyers.

Challenges Women Activists have to Face

Initially, the women's council faced accusations of being an NGO with foreign funding, and the activists were labeled as characterless, with their work receiving minimal recognition. The activists encountered resistance from traditional elders, the general public, and ultra-right religious clerics. In 2013, Muftis from Jaamia Ashrafiya Lahore issued Fatwas condemning their work, stating:

"Tabassum is removing Chaddars of women in Swat. She is trampling the prestige of women in Swat. She needs to be hanged" (Adnan, 2020).

The creation of the female Jirga provoked further resentment from traditional and patriarchal male Jirga members, who expressed their opposition by stating:

"These women activists need to be beaten. Their legs need to be broken because they cannot stay at home and are roaming like men in our society" (Adnan, 2020).

In 2017, there was a life-threatening attack on one of the activists, but such challenges and threats did not deter their commitment. The activists continue to face issues such as SMS threats, phone threats demanding they stay at home or face violence, and letters warning of potential harm to their children. Additionally, lawyers create obstacles by hindering their access to quick justice and other NGOs attempt to undermine their efforts by claiming credit for their work and introducing barriers due to biases.

Local People's Perceptions of the Jirga

Local perceptions of Khwendo-Jirga are overwhelmingly positive, with many appreciating its role in addressing women's issues. Some have even suggested that it be granted official status as a

governmental Jirga (Khushbu, 2020). In 2013, Swat Qaumi Aman Jirga invited Khwendo-Jirga for the first time to assist in a Swara case from Salmanpur Union Council. In this case, the father of seven-year-old Sanida eloped with another man's wife. When the eloping couple was caught, the Swat Qaumi Aman Jirga demanded that the father give his young daughter in Swara to settle the dispute.

Sanida's mother sought help from Khwendo-Jirga. Tabassum advocated for justice on behalf of Sanida, which led to the police arresting nine members of the Swat Qaumi Aman Jirga. Later, Khwendo-Jirga was asked to pardon the imprisoned individuals. Tabassum set conditions on behalf of Sanida's mother, which were accepted by Sanida's father. This collaboration between the male and female Jirgas successfully resolved Sanida's Swara case. Following this case, Khwendo-Jirga has resolved 12 to 13 additional Swara cases in Swat.

Larger Feminists' Perceptions of the Jirga

When asked about the debates surrounding the role of Khwendo-Jirga's women activists within the larger feminist discourse, Tabassum noted that the work of these activists is highly appreciated by prominent social workers and activists. Figures such as Shad Begum, Samar Minallah, Nighat Dad, and Sharmeen Obaid Chinoy, who are influential in shaping feminist discourse in Pakistan, have acknowledged their contributions.

Discussions and Conclusion:

Discussion

This study aimed to explore how the women activists of Khwendo-Jirga confront and resolve the cultural challenges faced by women in the patriarchal society of Swat. The findings, supported by the literature review and data analysis, demonstrate that Khwendo-Jirga represents a groundbreaking effort to challenge deep-rooted cultural norms and create spaces for women to exercise agency within a highly patriarchal context. This discussion addresses both the central research question and supplementary questions by integrating insights from the literature and primary data.

Formation of Khwendo-Jirga: A Response to Patriarchy

The establishment of Khwendo-Jirga by Tabassum Adnan was driven by the shortcomings of the male-dominated Jirga system, which failed to address women's issues adequately. As highlighted in the literature, Pashtun society traditionally excludes women from legal and societal decision-making processes (Nasreen Akhtar and Daniel A. Metraux, 2013), reinforcing patriarchal norms. However, Adnan's personal struggles, combined with the failure of traditional male Jirgas to provide justice in severe cases like acid attacks, compelled her to establish a women-led platform. As discussed in the literature, patriarchal systems often use cultural justifications to oppress women (Siddiqi, 2008), but Khwendo-Jirga has directly challenged this by providing an alternative platform for women's voices.

This answers the first supplementary research question, demonstrating that Khwendo-Jirga was founded as a response to the inadequacies of the patriarchal system and the personal hardships faced by its founder, creating a new avenue for women to seek justice.

Role of Women Activists in Addressing Issues

Women activists within Khwendo-Jirga play a critical role in addressing a wide range of issues, from inheritance disputes to violent crimes such as rape, forced marriages, and trafficking. According to the data, the organization's structure—dividing the activists into 25 groups across Swat—enables them to handle local and complex cases, demonstrating the effectiveness of grassroots activism. This operational structure reflects how activism can be adapted to local cultural contexts while pushing the boundaries of traditional norms, as discussed in feminist literature on movements in South Asia and North Africa (Tamang, 2009; De Alwis, 2009).

The literature supports the idea that women-led initiatives like Khwendo-Jirga not only address immediate legal and social issues but also challenge broader patriarchal structures. This aligns with the second and third supplementary questions, showing how women activists address a broad spectrum of issues and play a significant role in confronting the cultural challenges of women in Swat.

Challenges Encountered by Activists

The challenges faced by Khwendo-Jirga activists—ranging from character assassinations to death threats—highlight the strong resistance to female empowerment in patriarchal societies. The data indicates that both traditional elders and religious clerics, supported by fatwas, view the activists' efforts as threats to their societal control (Adnan, 2020). This is consistent with the literature, which discusses how patriarchal societies use religion and tradition to suppress women's rights (Nasreen Akhtar and Daniel A. Metraux, 2013). Despite these challenges, Khwendo-Jirga continues to provide a vital platform for women, illustrating how grassroots organizations can persist despite overwhelming opposition.

This addresses the fourth supplementary question by demonstrating the multifaceted challenges activists face, from societal pushback to threats from local authorities, as they continue their work.

Local and Feminist Perceptions of Khwendo-Jirga

The positive perception of Khwendo-Jirga among local people, as revealed in the data, indicates a gradual shift in societal attitudes toward women-led justice initiatives. As Swara cases have been successfully resolved by the Jirga, the acceptance of its role has grown, with calls to grant it official recognition as a governmental body (Khushbu, 2020). This mirrors the broader discussion in feminist literature, where women's movements in patriarchal societies, though initially met with resistance, gradually gain legitimacy through demonstrated success (Tamang, 2009).

Additionally, the acknowledgment of Khwendo-Jirga's role by prominent feminists such as Sharmeen Obaid Chinoy and Nighat Dad, as noted in the data, indicates that the platform's contributions are recognized within Pakistan's broader feminist discourse. This answers both the fifth and sixth supplementary questions, showing how Khwendo-Jirga is perceived positively within Swat Valley and how its contributions are debated within the feminist discourse in Pakistan.

Conclusion

The larger discourses on women's rights and empowerment are divided into various schools of

thought, including liberal, Marxist, radical, and Islamic feminism. Each perspective offers a distinct lens for addressing women's rights, without anyone being more right or wrong—simply different ways of analyzing the same issues. It is the researcher's responsibility to choose the most suitable framework for the particular problem under study.

In the case of Khwendo-Jirga in Swat, this women-led initiative represents a significant attempt by courageous women to have their voices heard within a male-dominated and conservative society. While it may not have fully dismantled the social structures of Swat, it has successfully carved out a space for women to exercise their agency and address their own issues. The success of Khwendo-Jirga demonstrates that women can claim their rights, which are guaranteed by both the Constitution of Pakistan and Islamic principles, even within restrictive cultural settings.

By working in collaboration with national and international organizations, the government, and traditional councils, Khwendo-Jirga has gained recognition not only in Swat but across Pakistan. The data collected through this study supports the conclusion that Khwendo-Jirga represents a form of "Subversion from Within," using existing structures to challenge and transform them from the inside. It has resolved numerous cases related to women's rights and continues to make a substantial difference in the lives of women in Swat.

As this initiative gains further traction, its impact on the broader feminist discourse in Pakistan will become clearer. Khwendo-Jirga's future contributions to women's empowerment, both locally and nationally, will be pivotal in shaping the ongoing feminist movement in the region. Its success highlights the importance of grassroots activism in promoting women's rights within traditionally patriarchal societies.

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