

THE AFTER-SCHOOL EXTRACURRICULAR NEEDS OF SWAT'S COLLEGE  
GIRLS

by

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## THESIS ABSTRACT

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Title: The After-school Extracurricular Needs of Swat's College Girls

Gender disparity in education is a global challenge. School-age girls are often denied equal opportunities as enjoyed by boys. This research aims to improve the poor state of female education in Pakistan by exploring options to develop a community space for college age girls in Swat.

This thesis focuses on the former princely state of Swat in northern Pakistan, an example of a place whose history of prioritizing education is largely overlooked. The Swat state heavily promoted education, but following its merger with Pakistan in 1969, many of the institutions it had created faltered. The Taliban takeover of the area in 2007 – 2009 further exacerbated the decline of education in the valley. Drawing upon the experiences of Ophelia's Place in Eugene, Oregon, and field interviews with over a hundred college girls and administrators, I have identified activities to enhance girls' education in Swat by developing innovative after-school possibilities.

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To Anita, My Parents, Siblings, Sulaiman, and the People of Swat



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## Chapter I

### INTRODUCTION

This thesis seeks to examine the afterschool extracurricular needs and options for college girls of Swat. It is assumed that by creating such possibilities, they will be able to avail of a physical community space wherein they can congregate and discuss their educational preferences and challenges. This serves the larger purpose of exploring female empowerment in correlation to girls' decision-making opportunities regarding their education outside of a formal school setting.

There are many misunderstandings that people both within Pakistan and outside of Pakistan have about Swat and particularly about the treatment of women in the valley. I selected it as my site out of the desire to work not so much as a researcher as much as a daughter of the soil on a mission to learn from her fellow Swati sisters about the realities of their lives. By doing this, I hope to gain a better understanding of what motivates them and animates them as they aspire for a positive future. I am also curious to explore the outcomes that the findings have had on my personal standpoint. Unlike recorded, existing research on the female education landscape of Swat, I wanted to put them first and not the community that they happen to hail from. I do this because their viewpoints are that of an underrepresented group.

Swat is home to a former princely state. While it acceded to join Pakistan in 1947, Swat did not fully become part of the country until the princely state was dissolved in 1969. The capital of the princely state was Saidu Sharif, which remains the district headquarters today and the economic hub is nearby Mingora. These two cities are locally dubbed as the twin cities of Swat and boast the largest number of female schools and

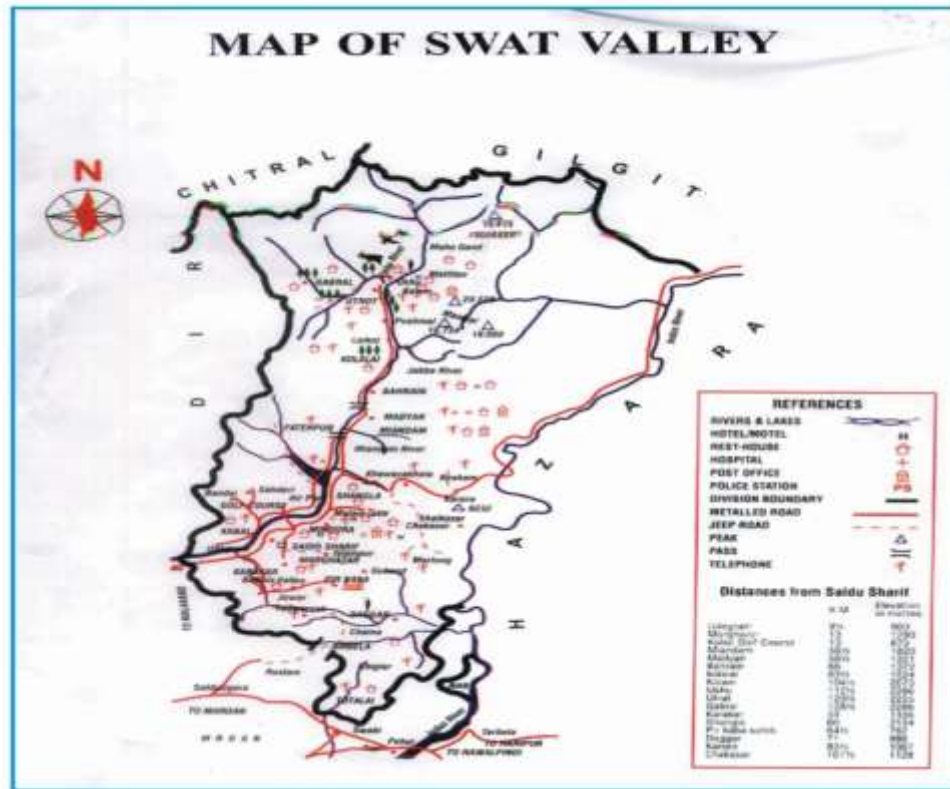
colleges in the valley (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2017). The rural valley of Swat is the third largest district in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, as seen in Figure 1.1

(Pakistan National Census, 2017). Despite being situated in a mountainous area, there is



**Figure 1.1.** Map of Pakistan denoting Swat. (Cartographer: Ashley Nepp; Source: Anita M. Weiss *Interpreting Islam, Modernity and Women’s Rights in Pakistan* Palgrave Macmillan 2014.)

actually a fair amount of interaction between residents of the various sections of Swat, most notably between its urban areas of Babozai (which includes Saidu Sharif and Mingora), Kabal, and Khwazakhela, whose locations are shown in Figure 1.2.



**Figure 1.2.** Detailed map of Swat Valley. (Source: Muhammad Hamayun; retrieved from: [www.researchgate.net](http://www.researchgate.net))

The overall female literacy rate in Swat is estimated to be 13.45 percent as compared to its male literacy rate which is recorded as 43.16 percent (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Government Portal, 2017). The people of Swat are predominantly ethnic Pakhtuns and primarily adhere to the Sunni sect of Islam. The most widely spoken language in the area is Pashto. Swat until early 2018 came under Pakistan’s Provincially Administered Tribal Areas (PATA), which restricted its autonomy somewhat. This grants power to the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in determining Swat’s education policies and academic curriculum (Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund, 2015).

Resistance to gender development programs in Swat is the result of non-Swati development practitioners who design programs with a skewed understanding of Swat’s history, culture and gender dynamics. In order to bridge the gap between gender

disparity in education and extracurricular opportunities, one must unpack the assumptions which are engendered by Pakhtun society, particularly Pakhtun men (Jamal, 2016). Jamal (2016) asserts that,

While Pakistani Pakhtun attitudes towards religion, culture, and politics differ, consensus established on major barriers to girls' access to education are poverty, Pakhtunwali (the Pakhtun code of conduct), religious conservatism, accessibility, resources, shortage of female teachers, curriculum, political apathy, and corruption.

If effective solutions are to be provided for improving female educational prospects in the area, one must first deconstruct the hurdles which prevent them from achieving this. Pakhtuns have had a very mixed reception towards female education which varies along tribal and class lines, among other factors. Conflict fatigue brought on by political instability in the region and the enforcement of hardline religious and cultural ideologies by groups like the Swat Taliban have exacerbated the issue (Jamal, 2016).

While research on women's social status in the Pakhtun-majority parts of Pakistan exists, there is little to none on community engagement and inclusive approaches to female education. The government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa declares the culprits to be poverty, shortage of female teachers and insufficient resources and infrastructure to improve female education (KP Higher Education Archives and Libraries Department, 2017). Additional factors which are important to consider but have gone largely untouched by the government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are the stances of family and communal decision makers as well as other influential figures who negatively impact the status of female education opportunities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Hunte, 2016).

Between the Taliban denouncing female education as a sinful act that Westernizes and hence pollutes female minds, making them digress from Islamic and Pakhtun norms,

and the Pakistan Army's retaliation against the Taliban, female educational institutions were either severely infrastructurally damaged or became 'ghost schools' because the students and teachers feared for their lives. Relief and rehabilitation initiatives have been implemented by the Pakistani government, Pakistan Army, Non Government Organizations (NGOs), and International NGOs (INGOs), and many promising projects are presently underway (Akbar, 1983; Chavis, 2001; Mann, 2005; Moghadam, 1992; Zulfacar, 2006).

Pakistan is an official signatory to the UN Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and the recently enacted Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, 2010).

These commitments bind Pakistan to safeguarding the rights of women and girls and prioritize their educational needs. Due to the ills of rampant corruption, neglect and, at times, lack of awareness by the Pakistan government, Pakistan has not effectively implemented these agreements at the local, provincial, and national levels. Thus, it should come as no surprise why Swat's female educational institutions and female enrollment figures are so worryingly low (Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, 2010). Weiss (2018, pp. 351) states that,

In today's Pakistan, political expediency has frequently played a prominent role in advocating legal changes to empower women within the context of an arguably restrictive political context that has significantly leaned towards an Islamic framework. A large number of organizations like SUNGI Development Foundation, Pattan, and even the political party 'Awami National Party' (ANP) that while not officially identified as female rights advocates are nonetheless substantively concerned with female rights and empowerment.



A major component of female rights and empowerment is to advocate affordable female education and suggest outlets that nurture women and girls intellectually and socially as well as help make them self-sufficient individuals. This thesis is based on the fact that the most visible and long-term actions of the Swat Taliban were built on the aggressive control of women and girls' mobility and activities. As Weiss (2013, pp. 179) further explains,

Girls' schools were either closed or destroyed, women were made to remove themselves from the workforce, and were admonished to wear the shuttlecock burqa.

This is a glaring departure from the policies of the Swat State. During the time of the Swat State, Swatis had access to formal education for males and females, a feat that was unprecedented in Pakistan's north, and the northwest in particular. Indeed, the rehabilitation and development projects initiated by the Pakistani government, the Pakistan Army and the NGO sector after the Taliban defeat in the area gained quick momentum owing to Swat's rich history of female education (Weiss, 2013).

The primary source of inspiration for this thesis is the school-age, female-serving prevention-based organization 'Ophelia's Place' in Eugene, Oregon. Ophelia's Place is a local private donation-sourced nonprofit that offers "life-changing" programs for the schoolgirls of Eugene, completely free of cost. Their services include school-based programming, skill-building, classes and clubs, and therapy (Ophelia's Place Resources, 2017). Bearing in mind the aforementioned findings, I envision a similar community space for Swati college girls as a necessary and viable project for their socio-educational wellbeing, though tuned to their particular needs and desires. My thesis conclusion will either refute or support this claim.

Social science research on this topic is scant, not only in Swat but everywhere in Pakistan as well. The available research to improve education in Swat fails to incorporate the voices of college girl students with regard to their needs and desires. The nature of existing research on Swat's college girls is often limited to their school accessibility, the quality of their education and the state of their college infrastructure. My status as a person of local origin has granted me unique access to information provided by roughly 100 interviewees that is usually unavailable to nonlocal researchers. This is often due to a general mistrust of nonlocal research motives and the belief that nonlocal researchers will not be culturally sensitive or informed. Furthermore, the graduate research courses that I enrolled in at the University of Oregon equipped me with the necessary knowhow to navigate and execute the goals for writing this thesis.

I have interwoven scholarly research on female education and women's empowerment challenges with what I have learned from the girls and various administrators who I have interviewed throughout this thesis. I also explore local cultural patterns concerning women's social position and status in Pakistan and Swat, the history of female education in Swat, and how prevailing social norms and values influence and shape prospects for extra-curricular activities leading to girls' empowerment.

An important aspect that is missing in the literature on female education in Swat is any mention of a physical community space, like Ophelia's Place, for the girls who are currently enrolled in school and college. Reasons given for this are either the lack of resources and/or the lack of demand. Upon arrival in Swat, I went in search of a physical community space wherein girls can congregate, collaborate on educational activities or

work together in enhancing their educational interests or devise solutions to social concerns and have them fulfilled.

These activities can be called ‘afterschool’ or ‘extracurricular,’ considering that they take place outside a formal school setting. Along these lines, they do not distract students from their formal education but actually aid them in attaining their educational goals, becoming socially empowered, enhance their awareness of educational options, and collectively consider their future career prospects.

### Significance

I am curious about seeking and unpacking the world views of college girls in Swat and exploring with them alternatives that can empower them more fully in the long term. What are their envisioned identities? How do they envision themselves as successful? What is the value that they have assigned to their education? In discussing education, where do they place that value and what do they imagine education will achieve? What challenges do these girls face in pursuing their education further? How does their education inform their value in the community of Swat; does it affect their positionality and self-perception? What are their standpoints, or viewpoints, with respect to their schooling? What other kinds of support do they consider they need to succeed in college? Are there other issues they would like to learn about but which are not included in their college’s syllabus? How is their identity as students important for the vision and future of Swat, if at all?

This thesis aims to mitigate the poor state of affairs concerning female education by exploring options to develop a community space for college age girls in Swat where

they can congregate after school. In particular, it seeks to identify possible extracurricular activities that can both serve their educational growth as well as empower them socially. It draws from the experiences of Ophelia's Place in Oregon while considering and incorporate local cultural sensitivities. Once my thesis is completed, copies of it will be distributed among Swati NGOs working for female empowerment.

### Research Questions and Methodology

The primary research question of this thesis is, what are Swat's college girls' views on their education and alternative opportunities, and do they currently have extracurricular spaces or what extracurricular educational programs currently exist for Swat's college girls?

The secondary question of this thesis is, what needs, interests and desires do Swat's college girls have and what conditions do they have to face in order to achieve them?

The inspiration for this research is the above-mentioned Ophelia's Place in Eugene, Oregon. The team describes it as, "A prevention-based organization dedicated to helping girls make healthy life choices through empowerment, education and support." ([www.opheliasplace.net](http://www.opheliasplace.net)). I became aware of Ophelia's Place's myriad activities while volunteering there during the summer of 2017. I observed all of their in-house programs including their 'strength-based' therapy sessions and their library which they opened to the entire community of girls in the city. I am glad that I was able to gain this experience at Ophelia's Place since literature on these kinds of alternatives and options as well as on prevention-based female-led organizations is scarce.

The fieldwork for this project was undertaken in Mingora and Saidu Sharif during January - March 2018. I intended to identify and select female second year Intermediate college students (Grade 12) as my research subjects. My selection was based on the fact that they were 18 years of age and therefore allowed to give personal consent for partaking in this research. I used an unstructured interview technique and took extensive classroom interviews of approximately 100 public school students. Furthermore, I conducted participant observation in the schools. To conduct these interviews, I visited the five biggest public schools in this area. I chose public schools due to their relatively high enrollment rates in Swat as compared to private schools (Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund, 2015). I conversed in Pashto and explained my research and informed consent process in detail to the school principals, teachers, other administrators, and students. The interviewees had a right to withdraw at any stage of the research process and could decline to answer a question whenever they desired. I guaranteed them anonymity and personal data confidentiality. The interviewees were interviewed in groups of five which assisted in data confidentiality. I read an oral consent statement in Pashto, the language used in Swat, and only moved forward with my questions once they agreed. For the interview process, I recorded notes in a journal and used a voice recorder, depending on the circumstances. The interview questions asked them what they do on a typical school day, what needs they have that could help them perform better in school, and what other interests they have that they would like to share with other girls.

I did not feel the need to be accompanied by a research assistant, since Saidu Sharif is my ancestral hometown and I am fluent in Pashto. For the analysis stage, I employed a feminist ethnographic lens. I have noted that feminist research is particular

about reflexivity or how one's positionality and privilege as a researcher affects their research analysis. This helps one address any biases they might harbor. Feminist research understands the importance of gender when studying social phenomena. It puts emphasis on experiences of at-risk, marginalized, vulnerable, underrepresented, othered populations and strongly condemns "gender blind" techniques of research as in, excludes gender while examining social phenomena that concerns all gender identities (Nagy Hesse-Biber, 2014).

It was important for me to comprehend my positionality while conducting and analyzing my research. Kirin Narayan's (1993) take on the reality of being a 'native anthropologist' struck a chord with me and made me draw parallels using my own experience as a native researcher. According to her, the insider – outsider research binary has sparked a polarizing debate. This is largely because while being a native can give one unique insights and access to data which they would not receive as a non-native, it becomes more challenging to address one's biases while researching an area associated with home. A native researcher must ask themselves if they write about subjects the way they see each other or the way they want to show them to the world, based on their shared history. Native anthropologists are susceptible to generalizing a culture and ignoring the individuality of their research subjects. "Hybridity" in anthropological writing is an asset for native researchers in that it acknowledges a bi-cultural status and appraises how that informs their judgements. It is equally important to recognize the power dynamics in this type of research. The native status of a researcher does not absolve them of the responsibility of adhering to research ethics. It is pertinent for people to understand that

native researchers are not necessarily the carriers of authentic truths about their community (Narayan, 1993).

Before proceeding on to analyze conditions facing school-going girls in Swat today, it is necessary to provide a historical analysis of the role and status of women and girls in education and related fields in Swat in Pakistan. Girls in pre-partition Pakistan would study in a *maktab*/elementary school, whose primary objective was to tutor boys and girls to read the *Qur'an* while also offering courses on rudimentary reading and writing – mostly in Urdu. Higher education was available at *madrassahs*/Muslim seminaries wherein gender segregation was the norm. That is to say, female students were secluded from their male counterparts via the practice of *pardah*/veiling (Mumtaz and Shaheed, 1987).

Before its time as a princely state, Swat did not have institutions, resources, investments, or awareness for formal education. This trend was uniform across the Pakhtun Tribal Belt in the northwest part of South Asia. A handful of people would be educated in Persian and Arabic but that knowledge was imparted to them in traditional institutions like *madrassahs* or being taught by tutors at home (Rome, 2008).

At the time, education was not institutionalized in buildings with set rules and regulations like it is today. Religious studies were given precedence over formal education and emphasis was placed more on oral transmission than on writing. Students would be taught to read the *Qur'an* but usually without translation or historical context. The ability to read and write were deemed to only benefit one in careers requiring high qualification like medicine, engineering, law, and administration (Rome, 2008).

Formal education as we know it today was first introduced by the British who subsequently sanctified it through British colonial legislation (Rome, 2008). Shortly after, the Swat State (1849 – 1969) organized the mushrooming of formal educational institutions under the largesse of its *walis* (kings), as we will see in Chapter 2.

Swat has borne the brunt of these culture wars that are being fought over the question of girls' and women's roles and rights in society (Weiss 2014). As will be seen in Chapter 2, much has changed in Swat since the end of the Swat state in 1969, the demise of female educational options once the federal government took over responsibility for the area, the subsequent rise of the Taliban, and the rebuilding which has occurred in more recent years (Ahmad, 2012).

Swat has suffered immensely over the polarizing and complex debate of female social roles and rights in the valley. The UN hails female education to be an inalienable birthright which acts as a catalyst for gender development and overall social prosperity. It elevates girls' and women's status among their families and the wider community. Educated girls and women have a greater sense of autonomy over their lives and matters pertaining to their household. This covers matters like family-planning and child rearing in a way that is healthy, informed, and inclusive (Ahmad, 2012).

But alas, this is viewed as an existential threat to society by many reactionaries and often translates into the deliberate subjugation of girls and women in Pakistan. Stripping them of their right to an education is the most common and powerful way of achieving this purpose. In Swat, many people espouse a fallacious definition of honor and wrongfully burden girls and women with being carriers of the family honor. In their minds, educating a girl makes it difficult for them to control her which would ultimately



end in her shaking the very foundations of their “time-honored” way of life (Ahmad, 2012).

As we explore in this thesis, Swat’s history, the role of women in society and challenges confronting the expansion of female education, we will also hear the words of girls in Swat regarding their aspirations for their future. Many have offered suggestions for additional courses and programs that they can take outside of the school day that we will explore later in this thesis. We will also be exploring how such programs might actually be constructed.

## Chapter II

### SWAT

It is impossible to overstate the symbolic importance of Swat in Pakistan's history as well as today. Long considered 'the Switzerland of the Orient,' Swat connotes a special location and way of life in the region. However, over time, Swat's fortunes have changed considerably, which has huge implications for Pakistan today and for its future.

The U-shaped valley of Swat is located in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Swat currently functions as an administrative district in Pakistan's northwestern region. It shares a border with Gilgit-Baltistan to the north, Buner, Mardan and Malakand to the south, Kohistan and Shangla to the east, and Upper Dir and Lower Dir to the west.

Swat is surrounded by one the largest mountain sub-ranges in the world – the Hinduraj -which further expands into the Hindukush range. This administrative district is home to scenic rivers, lakes, glaciers, year-round snowcapped mountains, lush coniferous forests, and rare wildlife. This made it a popular destination with tourists, both domestic and international. Swat's rivers and plentiful freshwater sources also make it an ideal setting for growing crops. The agriculture industry of Swat presently stands at approximately 31 percent of its economy. The primary cash crops comprise apples, peaches, turnips, rice, maize, and wheat. The apples and peaches, in particular, are of export quality and are seasonally supplied to domestic and foreign markets. Swat is also renowned for its honey, especially that of the palosa shrub, endemic to the area. In addition, Swat boasts rainbow trout fish hatcheries which were introduced to the area by the British in the early 1900s.

The ancient names of Swat were Udiyana and Suvastu. The valley was one of the major seats of the Gandharan civilization, which was the intersection between Bactrian-

Greek culture and South Asian Buddhism. The Gandharan civilization dates back thousands of years. Its rich ethno-religious heritage historically played an integral role in attracting religious tourism, mostly from foreign practitioners of Buddhism and Hinduism.

The district headquarters of Swat is Saidu Sharif although the most populous city and commercial capital is Mingora, which abuts it. The overall area of Swat is 5,337 square kilometers. According to Pakistan's 2017 National Census, the total population of Swat is over 2.3 million. The male - female sex ratio is approximately 51:50, which is quite balanced for the region, especially considering the national sex ratio is far more inequitable. The economically active population is 54 percent of adult men, just over half. The average number of children per family is six, thereby underscoring that Swat still has a high population growth rate.

The predominant ethnic group in Swat are Pakhtuns of the Yusafzai tribe and the most widely spoken language is Pashto, although a growing number of people can now speak the national language Urdu. Despite the overwhelming majority of Pakhtuns and Muslims in Swat, there is a significant population of ethnic and religious minorities. The largest ethnic minority are Kohistanis, a nomadic group that migrates throughout northern Pakistan, and Punjabis. The largest religious minorities are Sikhs and Hindus.

Swat is administratively divided into seven tehsils (sub-districts): Babuzai; Matta (Upper Swat); Khwazakhela; Barikot; Kabal; Charbagh; and Bahrain. These tehsils consist of sixty-five union councils.

The provincial government's method for planning schools in Swat is laid out very clearly in their rules of business: the district administration suggests to the provincial government the need for a new school at a certain location in the district. Following this, the

provincial department of education agrees and puts in a request to the finance department to allocate funds for the same in the provincial government's upcoming annual budget of expenditure. It should be on a non-political interference basis, although the reality is that the local member of parliament (MPA) can prevail on the provincial government via the Chief Minister (the senior-most member of the Provincial Assembly) to unilaterally announce a school in a location of their choosing, which is usually the case. This is mostly done so that the MPA can have a person of their choice employed in the school as a political favor to them. Therefore in practice, the Chief Minister usurps the power and job of the provincial Department of Education. The districts are largely saturated with primary schools, resulting in the upgradation from elementary to middle, middle to high and high to higher-secondary school. These happen on a political and need-be basis.

To underscore the considerable gender divide in power and decision making in Swat, it is noteworthy that while anyone can contest a seat for the National Assembly, there are also 'reserved seats' for women to be appointed by the political party that wins the most seats in the district. Swat has a total of 3 open seats for the National Assembly, and 8 reserved seats for the provincial assembly which are available to both men and women. In practice, however, only men have actually been directly elected to the three seats from Swat. These reserved seats are not constituency-specific and appointees are at the discretion of the ruling party's parliamentary committee. Therefore, this arrangement of women being appointed to a reserved seat after each election enables women to have a voice, albeit limited. At present, Swat has only one woman member of the Provincial Assembly who was selected for the reserved seat.

The 'Yousafzai State of Swat' was founded in 1849 by Abdul Ghafoor - widely referred to as the *akhund* (a spiritual leader) - not on the basis of any military conquest but because of communal recognition of his religious piety. This set the Swat state apart from other princely states in the area because the local people enthusiastically placed their trust in their leader rather than simply feared him. The first ruler of the Swat state after its formal recognition by the British government in 1926 was Miangul Abdul Wadud, who adopted the mantle of *wali*. As the first Wali of Swat (1926-1949), he was dedicated to improving Swatis' livelihoods. During his reign, Swat prospered as a welfare state with ready availability of accessible and affordable education, healthcare, civil infrastructure, and speedy justice, the latter often overseen by the wali himself.

Prior to the wali establishing western style, secular schools, girls in Swat, as noted earlier in Chapter 1, would study in a *maktab*, a religiously focused elementary school whose main purpose was to teach both boys and girls to read the Qur'an. They also offered courses on basic reading and writing. Higher education was available at *madrassahs* (Muslim seminaries) wherein gender segregation was practiced. Enrolled girls and women were secluded from their male counterparts in separate classrooms, separated by walls.

Despite not having been formally educated, the wali strongly endorsed formal, secular education for both males and females soon after coming to power. He was of the view that a quality education was the key factor that provided colonial authorities like the British power over their subjects. He did not ignore female education and opened the first public girls' school the year he founded the Swat state, in 1926. To push his agenda for a modern, progressive and prosperous Swat, he authorized his troops to go door to door throughout the valley and order that every girl be present in school the following day. If they were met with

any objections to this order, they were instructed to physically punish the fathers or male guardians of these girls.

While Swat was governed by autocratic rule, the wali was held in high regard among the citizenry due to his affording them a sense of worth and importance as well as the promise of a better life. The state was committed to granting basic necessities, public utilities and security to all segments of society in Swat. This won it the reputation of being a model princely state of South Asia and the most celebrated princely state in what now comprises Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Pakistan became a sovereign republic in 1947 and was acceded to by a large number of princely states that came within its territorial boundary. The Swat state also agreed to join the new country, but after some time. The state's rulers still retained their royal titles and a high measure of autonomy in so far it did not conflict with Pakistan's national interests. Two years later, in 1949, Miangul Abdul Wadud handed the baton of wali to the heir apparent, his son Miangul Abdul Haq Jahanzeb. This last wali of the princely state supported his father's vision for Swat and went on to uphold and further develop the state machinery which was introduced by the first wali. During his reign, public schools proliferated, and he opened even more girls' schools than his father (Ahmed and Torwali, 2016). There was so much demand now for girls' education that people say there were not enough schools. There was one private school, the Sangota School, which existed in Swat during this time. The product of a Christian mission convent, it was built on land and with construction costs provided by the Swat state (Rome, 2008). Elites tended to send their sons and daughters there, instead of to the regular public schools, to set themselves apart, but it is widely considered that the quality of the public schools was similar to that of the Sangota School.

When a citizen of the Swat state, regardless of familial connections, gender, and social class, received distinctions in school, the Swat state would financially support their advanced studies elsewhere in Pakistan as well as abroad. The wali set up Jahanzeb College in 1952, which distinguished Swat even more from its neighbors since this was a watershed move to prod the state forward and join the modern world, benefitting males and females alike. According to the 1951 Pakistan Census, Swat had unmatched enrollment and literacy rates for females in comparison with the surrounding Pakhtun territories (Rome, 2008).

The demise of the Swat state was provoked by the resignation of Pakistani President Ayub Khan in 1969, the father of the wives of two of the wali's sons. At that time, Swat formally acceded to join the Republic of Pakistan. A five-year transition period ensued to enable Pakistani state policies and its administrative structure to replace those of the Swat state. From 1970 onwards, there was little to no investment in formal education in Swat, and whatever little there was mainly prioritized boys' elementary schooling. Neither the federal nor the provincial governments granted scholarships after the cessation of the Swat state and Jahanzeb College seemed all but forgotten by them. The new bureaucratic formation put non-Swati people in charge of the bureaucracy; consisting of bureaucrats who were unacquainted with the indigenous ways and habits. They would take long periods of time to draft and implement policies and make decisions which had been managed much more efficiently under the wali's administrative process (Weiss, 2015).

## Swat's Transition from a Pro-Female Education Princely State to Taliban Opposition to Girls' Schools

The status of Swat as a thriving community was cut tragically short soon after its complete merger with Pakistan in 1969. The events that led to its political, economic and social downfall were in large part caused by the failure of the federal and, consequently, provincial government to prioritize Swat.

The once quick and efficient state machinery of schools, hospitals, legal institutions, and roads rapidly deteriorated and sent out a clear message to Swatis – they did not matter to Pakistan or to the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

This triggered a domino effect which manifested most visibly in a wave of Islamic radicalization that took over the valley between the 1990s-2000s. The president of Pakistan at the time was the centrist military dictator General Pervez Musharraf. Under his tenure, the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), an Islamist political party that sympathized with the Taliban, was able to form the provincial government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and won by a landslide in Swat during the general election (Weiss 2008). The MMA used Islamist rhetoric to gain favor among the Swatis and promised to fill the growing power void created by the federal and provincial governments. Their religious hardline stance enabled the rise in popularity of Fazlullah (the leader of the Swat faction of the Taliban). Fazlullah hosted an FM radio channel through which he instigated the men and women of Swat to disregard the federal and provincial governments as well as disown 'western inventions and practices.' Unfortunately, female education and women's employment were at the fore of his ideological belief.



Fazlullah took advantage of Swatis' frustration against their government for treating them as lesser citizens and ultimately paved the way for a complete Taliban takeover between 2008-09. The people of Swat found themselves caught amidst a government that had cared little for them and a militant group that took their social setup back in time. Avis (2016) argues that,

The Taliban militants in Swat have exploited frustrations resulting from decades of poor governance, corruption and wide ranging socio-economic shortfalls. Gender in and of itself was not initially a core conflict issue but became a focal point at a later stage with the destruction of girls' schools and attacks on working women.

It would not be inaccurate to call the conflict in Swat a war on female education (Hassan, 2009). Girls' schools were selected as a focal targets because such actions directly conflicted with Musharraf's 2004 policy of Enlightened Moderation that worked in favor of female education, employment, and empowerment. Musharraf's government had made it easier and more acceptable for girls and women to take up positions at all governmental levels and do more among NGOs (Avis, 2016).

The women of Swat who supported Fazlullah were mostly illiterate and unemployed. They chose to contribute initially to his crusade by selling their jewelry and donating all the proceeds to his mission. According to them, it felt empowering to be addressed by a religious man who addressed them directly, taught them about religion and emphasized the importance of their role in his agenda (Weiss, 2014).

In some measure, it made them feel relevant and connected to the modern world by tuning into his FM radio broadcasts – often on cell phones and using it as a vehicle to learn about religion. Having said that, many of these women stopped endorsing the Swat Taliban upon realizing that his laws were regressive and barbaric and, ultimately, against Islam and the state. Even during the conflict, they urged the government of Pakistan to

restore peace in the valley through the means of providing safe, accessible income opportunities, improving and rebuilding schools, and aiding them in maximizing self-empowerment (Weiss, 2014).

Realizing the volatility of the situation in Swat, Musharraf finally deployed the Pakistan Army in May 2009 to control the crisis that had ensued in the valley. In some measure they have been successful in restoring peace and stability in the years that followed, but the pre and post-conflict damage in Swat is extensive and will take decades for the valley to recover. Details on this issue have been provided in Chapter 3.

Kandiyoti's (1988) take on the concept and manifestation of patriarchy comes very close to the state of affairs in Swat regarding the patriarchal oppression of its women and girls. When reading this thesis, the question may arise about why Swat's women and girls are in favor of female education but do not express the same resolve when it comes to them joining the workforce. The answer is that the role of culture is central to the broader concept of patriarchy. Women and girls make "patriarchal bargains" by responding to patriarchy within the bounds of their culture. Patriarchy is not simply male dominance but is rather a mindset that can be espoused by all genders. Third Wave feminists have argued that the dominant notion of patriarchy is Eurocentric and is erroneously regarded as a monolith. To put it simply, lived realities of culture and history do not have enough room in feminist canons. Patriarchal bargains are influenced by social strata like class, caste, ethnicity, creed, and the like. These have several variations and nuances. What women choose to do in their patriarchal bargains, whether or not they want to condemn the status quo, reflects on the socio-political environment they were raised in and their "gendered subjectivity" (Kandiyoti, 1988).

Bhasin (1993) is another feminist scholar whose definition of patriarchy resonates with my research. According to her, males systemically have social, moral, physical, political, and economic authority which they exercise as their right. Patriarchy makes women internalize the belief that they are caregivers by nature and must prove their worth in society giving birth to children and by obeying and serving men, particularly the men of the household. As discussed by Carole Pateman in *The Sexual Contract* (1988), women are used as vessels to carry on the male line and express gratitude to the men in the family by carrying out unacknowledged work. This is most visible in patrilineal societies such as Pakistan (Bhasin, 1993).

In this way, Swat is the example of a patriarchal society which had made commendable advances in female education due to the resoluteness of the walis but is still in need of visible, safe, accessible and affordable public spaces for women and girls – including college girls. We will learn more about this in Chapter 3.

### Chapter III

#### THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN SWAT

The women and girls of Swat have consistently fared better socially than their female counterparts in the rest of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. During the era of the Swat state, they had the liberty to acquire a formal education and had protection under an efficient justice system if ever their rights were at risk. The personal security of Swati women and girls were two of the salient features of the Swat state's administrative agenda. Crimes like honor killing, forced marriages and the illegal trafficking of women outside of Swat would be taken to court and resolved in no more than two weeks. Many of these women and girls went on to become professional teachers and even made inroads in other fields like medical nursing (Buneri, 2012).

As a matter of fact, after the partition of Pakistan and India in 1947, a sizeable number of female teachers were recruited from Swat by the Pakistani government in order to teach at schools in the rest of modern-day Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Their duties comprised heading teacher training programs and teaching at schools that were understaffed (Jilani, 2018).

Traditionally, the women of Swat are expected to wear the *parunay* (typically a white fabric that is wrapped around the head, most of the body and face, and over one's clothes). This is worn in public and in front of men after girls reach puberty, and is a customary Pakhtun rite of passage. A fair number of women in Swat choose to keep their face uncovered – an uncommon sight in the rest of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Buneri, 2012). The *parunay* fabric is commonly embroidered with motifs or symbols that are

representative of the area, as seen in Figure 3.1. This is not expected to be worn at home or when only in the presence of women and children.



**Figure 3.1.** The Swat Motif (source: Swat Museum Archives)

Swati men are usually not strictly averse to the women of their family being employed outside the house if they remain covered when working with other men. The most common income generating professions for literate and qualified Swati women are teaching at the school level, school administration, medical nursing and medicine – especially gynecology and pediatrics. For illiterate or undereducated Swati women it is handicraft production, postharvest handling, animal husbandry, herbal health therapy, midwifery, and running small-scale kiosk shops from home (Jilani, 2018). A number of unemployed women earn a small income by profiting from Swat’s tourism industry. They cook foods and craft souvenirs which are sold to tourists by their children after school (Buneri, 2012). Tourist-related income opportunities markedly declined with the rise in violence in Swat during the takeover of the valley by the Swat Taliban, and have still not been restored to its pre-Taliban state.

The national Government of Pakistan and the provincial Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have, over the decades, grossly undervalued and even appear disinterested in matters concerning Swat. There has been a noticeable decline in the once promising

social status of Swati women since the dissolution of the Swat state in 1969. The number of female educational institutions rapidly decreased throughout the valley and the existing institutions were either underfunded, understaffed or unmaintained (Jilani, 2018).

A crucial element that was missing from the federal, provincial and local governments' agendas was incentivization programs to promote female education and take strict action against those who sabotage such programs. Oversights like these sparked undesirable outcomes which led to the downfall of all the state institutions in Swat (Buneri, 2012). Swatis who lived pre-merger were forced to witness their children and grandchildren live a substandard life in a valley that seemed to matter little to the elected governments. The 'nail in the coffin' was the subpar and corrupt processes in Swat's legal institutions which had cases pending for years which would have been resolved in days during the Walis' rule (Jilani, 2018).

The Swat faction of the Taliban took advantage of this opportunity and rallied the disillusioned Swati masses around them. They vowed to fill the power vacuum that existed following the end of the Swat state and promised to restore the efficient justice system of the past. Consequently, things took a turn for the worse and for the first time after Swat's merger with Pakistan, Swati women and girls had their fundamental human rights of free mobility and a formal education denied to them by the Taliban militants (Buneri, 2012).

In the years that followed, Swat became the site for two military operations between the Taliban militants and the Pakistan Army – Operation Rah-e-Haq/The First Battle of Swat (2007) and Operation Rah-e-Rast/The Second Battle of Swat (2009). Around this time, the federal Government of Pakistan categorically branded Swat as a

conflict zone and unsafe for civilian habitation. This prompted a mass exodus of internally displaced persons (IDPs) to leave Swat and seek refuge in the parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa that were relatively safer (Pakistan Army Web Portal, 2018).

Female education programs, projects and opportunities in Swat had come to a complete halt. Those girls and women who could afford it enrolled in education programs outside of Swat but they were vastly outnumbered by students who could no longer continue their education (Pakistan Army Web Portal, 2018).

In 2010, the Pakistan Army claimed to have successfully regained control of the valley and worked with the Pakistan government to launch and run rehabilitation and relief programs for the affectees of the military operation in Swat. Keeping in line with these joint efforts, they encouraged the proliferation of women-centric nonprofits and were most enthusiastic about the ones which promoted female education and livelihood opportunities (Buneri, 2012). As of 2018, there has been a slight improvement in female literacy and a reclaim of public spaces albeit limited to the zones of Saidu Sharif and Mingora, with a strong Pakistan Army presence. Moreover, there is an evident increase in small to medium-scale income generation programs for women, arranged by the Pakistan government, the Pakistan Army and/or Swati social activists. Most of these are offered in the form of vocational training centers but have a notoriously short life span (Jilani, 2018). The plausible reasons for this are explained in Chapter 4.

The Female District Education Officer of Swat, Ms. Shameem Akhtar, states that education is highly prioritized by the sitting governments in Swat district and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. Existing and proposed education projects in Swat have drawn an extraordinary level of focus and investment from stakeholders at all levels, particularly

civil society, affiliated development groups, and other donors. The Swat Education Department, under the government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, tackles the pressing issues of educational access, quality, and governance in Swat. These reforms combine standardized measurements and a clear and attainable system of accountability (kpese.gov.pk, 2018). The department's first priority is to increase the enrollment numbers in schools, under which girls from grades 6 - 12 are being granted a stipend by the government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In order to guarantee quality education and transparency, the department recruits teachers under the monitoring of a third party. When it comes to the rehabilitation and infrastructure of schools in Swat, millions of Pakistani rupees have been allocated to the concerned authorities. To achieve better governance, projects on school consolidation and school clustering are currently underway. Finally, a 'Swat Education Sector Plan' has been designed to cope with the challenges of modern education and is set to launch within the coming months (kpese.gov.pk, 2018). The main objectives of the Swat Education Department are as follows:

- To increase equitable access to early childhood education and to primary, middle/elementary and secondary education;
- To improve the curriculum and learning outcomes;
- To improve teacher quality;
- To strengthen governance and service delivery;
- To improve resource allocation;
- To develop adult literacy and non-formal education programs;



- To introduce some important cross-cutting areas such as Information and Communications Technology (ICT), education in emergencies, gender equity, social cohesion and public private partnership in education (kpese.gov.pk, 2018).

Akhtar (kpese.gov.pk, 2018) states that “We will continue to reform education in Swat to keep the promise of an education system that prepares our children for the future.”

The District Education Officer of Swat, Ms. Zaib-Un-Nisa<sup>1</sup>, considers that the world is currently entering an impulsive wave of challenges. According to her,

Educational institutions in Pakistan must strengthen and equip their students with necessary capabilities to meet these new challenges. With the dawn of the new millennium, the establishment of an exclusively dynamic and profoundly committed department (Swat Education Department) was envisioned. The vision stands realized in a short span of time. It has been recognized as an organization with a difference. Strategic thinking, dynamism, unwavering commitment, foreseeing future needs and educating the youth accordingly are the core traits of the department.

The department aims to tackle and prevent challenges associated with the state of education in a poor country like Pakistan. It credits innovative technology like laptops and electronic tablets with making students feel equipped to take on the competitive and complex global education arena. The department has been able to combine the expertise being used in advanced technologies and the knowledge of integrating it with existing needs. Its emphasis is on personnel growth by enhancing the ability to foresee, assess, strive and succeed. It has the satisfaction of envisioning the future needs, both national and global, and is doing its best to develop human resources in Pakistan. The department provides a unique opportunity to those aspiring individuals who want to make their careers in the national, regional and international society. It has sufficient strength to educate, train and equip them with the knowledge and skills, needed for success. Zaib

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<sup>1</sup> As mentioned in kpese.gov.pk, 2018.

(kpese.gov.pk, 2018) says, “I wish to see them as future leaders all those educated from Swat Education Department schools.”

Education is the primary agent of effective change and an important pillar of government. Safe and affordable education helps people harness technical and professional skills. It is only through this that they can become productive participants in the development and progress of their country. The education department was established with the aim to fulfill a state’s responsibility to provide basic education to its people. The prime objective of the department is to look after the educational affairs within the province and coordinate with the federal government and donor agencies regarding the promotion of education in the province. The Swat Education Department plays a supervisory role for primary education and also manages secondary education, technical education, incentive programs and development schemes (kpese.gov.pk, 2018). The Swat Education Department aims to achieve the following goals:

To provide free and compulsory primary education; to increase primary net enrollment rates; to provide buildings to all open air schools; to provide missing facilities to all schools; to functionalize closed schools; to reduce the gender gap; to reduce the urban and rural gap; to upgrade primary schools to elementary schools; to provide IT labs to secondary and higher secondary schools; to enhance quality through improved learning outcomes (kpese.gov.pk, 2018).

The Swat Education Department keeps in line with the UN Resolution of the UN General Assembly Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). This was unanimously passed as a resolution on 20 November 1989. Article 28 of the CRC envisions<sup>2</sup>,

The state will provide compulsory and free primary education to all; encourage secondary education; make higher education accessible to all; make sure to encourage regular attendance at schools; reduce drop-out rates; and ensure school discipline.

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<sup>2</sup> As written by Vainio–Mattila, 2001

Along these lines, the Education Department has defined its Mission Statement to affirm that the government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa stands committed to universalizing education, unfolding strong policy actions for raising literacy to one hundred percent and reforming education in Swat with the help of the democratic government and its elected representatives, to secure gradual, but visible and sustainable improvement for accessing quality education with ease (kpes.gov.pk, 2018). Abdullah Alam, research fellow at the Institute of Social and Policy Sciences in Islamabad reports that, at the primary level in Swat district, gender parity has increased from 67 percent (67 girls for every 100 boys) in 2008 - 09 to 93 percent in 2013 – 14 (more consistent with the figures at the time of the Swat state). However, the same could not be said for middle and higher school education where the rate only increased from 43 percent to 54 percent in those six years. There are only 20 schools in Swat at the higher education level. The situation is undoubtedly worse for girls where there are 480 primary schools but only 49 middle, 35 secondary and 5 higher secondary schools.

The five higher secondary schools, covering a geographical area of 5,337 square kilometers of Swat, easily presents an overview of the opportunities available to girls to undertake higher education. Focus group discussions I held with parents from Swat revealed that coeducation schools in the district do not have separate toilets for boys and girls. This has huge implications for girls and is one of the many reasons why they drop out (Alam, 2015).

The Pakhtun code of life (*Pakhtunwali*) restricts women's empowerment. Pakhtun culture is mostly male dominated, thus providing a vast range of power and authority to its male members. Further, Pakhtunwali prioritizes men and their strengths whereas

women are considered to be weaker and subservient, best suited to stay out of the public eye. In addition, the Pakhtun code of life includes traits and institutions mostly associated with men such as *ghairat* (valor), *badal* (revenge), *jirga* (informal political structure), *hujra* (common guest house), and similar concepts that solely revolve around men. These traits are mostly linked with power, authority and prestige while women are associated with the traits of *melmastya* (hospitality), *tor* (stigma), and *peghor* (satire) (Naz and Chaudhry 2011).

We now step slightly away from Swat to scrutinize the status of female education in Pakistan. Doing so might prove beneficial in making better sense of the present status of female education in Swat.

Following the abolition of the Princely State of Swat, the successive governments have consistently failed to maintain its once efficient governmental state machinery. The valley is a hotbed of socio-political issues. If these continue to go unaddressed by the sitting government, the undesirable outcomes will only further escalate. By underestimating Swat's geo-political power in the region and not investing in its education, Pakistan will inevitably be engulfed by its population explosion crisis and will be unable to join the ranks of highly educated, developing countries (Aziz et. al., 2014). This puts emphasis on certain key messages including that reform ought to incorporate each facet of the education systems – elementary/middle, higher education and vocational education. The prevailing education crisis must be tackled holistically as Pakistan is not in a position to deprioritize any issue that concerns education. The issues at hand are interrelated and concurrent. It is imperative for plans of action to be designed with clearly set goals and handle pertinent areas like administration, funding, human resource

management, and curriculum development. In the end, Pakistan must take calculated steps to widely implement these plans once they are adopted. Success is contingent on the will to initiate and sustain reform, demonstrated by the government and civil society (Aziz et. al., 2014).

It is concerning to observe that the government has not yet disclosed how they rank Pakistan's socio-political and related issues in terms of urgency. Political leaders and other influential figures in Pakistan often hesitate to persuade reactionary social groups into accepting the significance of formal education for all, to not risk losing their position in society. (Aziz et. al., 2014).

I argue that female education is universally recognized in theory, but is heavily politicized on party and gender lines and therefore has not developed at a fast rate in the developing world. Views on the purpose, content, and methods of delivery are at the center of such debates (Bradley and Saigol, 2012). There is a widespread assumption of the incompatibility of Islamic values and beliefs with women's education. (*Ibid.*) Modern, secular education has been accused by religious extremists of corrupting the nation's women; whom they regard as symbols of the community and critical to the intergenerational transmission of religious values and beliefs. Therefore, as of late, Islamic organizations have expanded the roles of *madrassahs* in providing mainstream and religious education, including increased numbers of *madrassahs* for girls. (*Ibid.*)

The UNDP ranks Pakistan at 120<sup>th</sup> out of 146 countries with regard to its Gender Development Index and 92<sup>nd</sup> out of 94 countries by its Gender Empowerment Measurement. There is a noticeable increase in the gender gap among various sectors in the country (Naz and Chaudhry, 2011). The image of the quintessential Pakistani woman

has been constituted in varying ways throughout history. There appears to be a lack of scholarly literature that analyzes how the state has been formally implicated in the constitution of working women's identities. Gender as a topic is also largely absent from the literature on labor politics. (*Ibid.*) Women's traditional activities as wives and mothers are still represented as their main contribution to the nationalist struggle. As wives, women are expected to influence their husbands and male relatives and as mothers, they are asked to socialize youth into Islamic culture (Naz and Chaudhry, 2011).

According to Constitutional Amendment 25-A (2010), the state shall provide free education up to the age of 16 years to all citizens, regardless of their caste, color or creed. Allowing for the time lag between policy decisions and actions, the increase in enrollments and decline in out-of-school children should be visible within a three to five-year period (Pakistan Status Report, UN Women, 2016). UN Women consider that this key amendment and subsequent policy actions have yet to show any promise. Only 2 percent of the GDP is spent on education, mostly on salaries and administrative expenditures, and less than a quarter of the allocations are available for improving the quality of education. Progress in reducing gender disparities in education varies across provinces and within regions. Improved access to primary school and increased enrollment, especially for girls is undermined by slow progression through school, grade repetition and the failure to complete primary school (Pakistan Status Report, UN Women, 2016). The sharp contrast between primary and middle school enrollments, especially for girls remains a matter of concern. In 2013 - 14, 60 percent of girls (Ages 6 - 10) were enrolled in primary school; this falls to 32 percent girls (Ages 11 - 13) in middle school and only 13 percent (Ages 14 - 15) in Matriculation. This implies that a

quarter or less of all girls enrolled in primary school make it through high school. As a primary driver of access to opportunities in life, this alarming gap is a matter of serious concern. Vision 2025, the key planning framework right now for the Government of Pakistan, notes that women are key contributors to the economic future of the country (UN Women, Pakistan Status Report, 2016).

Women's access to higher education has increased overall in Pakistan, yet it is limited to those with access to resources and proximity to such institutions. Higher education in nontraditional fields is too rarely viewed as a sound investment for women. Socioeconomic class continues to be a factor limiting access to women from disadvantaged backgrounds, though the availability of scholarships and affirmative action has improved access somewhat. Other critical factors in limiting access to higher education are: the widespread perception and acceptance of women's social role as homemaker, lower returns on education, expected discriminatory practices at the workplace and possible harassment (UN Women, Pakistan Status Report, 2016).

For those with limited or no education, skills training offers the possibility of improving their socioeconomic position. The emphasis in recent years, both globally and in Pakistan, on credit and entrepreneurship, has spurred investments in these areas. However, statistics reveal that here too women are marginalized in terms of the kind of training offered, and the level of credit available to them. Only 11 percent of women (Ages 15 - 64) have received technical or vocational education and within this the majority have an educational qualification of the elementary level or less. The majority has received training in embroidery and knitting or in tailoring and sewing, 13 percent and 75 percent, respectively (Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement 2013 -

14). In contrast, 32 percent of men have mostly taken a course in driving or in assorted trades. The average earning for the trainings received by women is approximately PKR 5000 per month and male drivers receive approximately PKR 12000 per month. The doors to the economic advancement of women remain limited whether it is through education or through training (UN Women, Pakistan Status Report, 2016).

Various studies on the characteristics of children who are receiving a formal education suggest that an educated father and mother share a positive link with higher enrollment in formal educational institutions. An interesting finding is that children in developing countries are less likely to be enrolled if their parents are self-employed in the agriculture sector as opposed to those in non-agricultural careers (UN Women, Pakistan Status Report, 2016).

Parents' education and non-agricultural work status significantly impact the likelihood of a child being in school. Mothers' education and work status (paid employment) are comparatively more important determinants of school enrollment than that of fathers'. The presence of a television in the household has a positive influence on girls' enrollment, more than boys. Gender parity improves somewhat for graduate and post-graduate education as in, 14 years and more of schooling (Pakistan Status Report, UN Women, 2016).

Policies that are pro-women and girls need to acknowledge the intersectional connections between gender and social status as constituents of female social identity (Delavande and Zafar 2013). Gender discrimination in Pakistan, however, is rather paradoxical. On the one hand, some women have prominent political leadership, such as holding office in the government while on the other hand, there is an increasing gender



gap in literacy. (*Ibid.*) Critelli and Willett (2012) have found that women who come from lower socioeconomic circles generally have fewer chances of upward mobility and also have greater constraints. Discrimination against these women at the hands of men renders them even further marginalized, puts them at greater risk and leaves them at a heightened socio-economic disadvantage. The international media prefers to give coverage to Pakistan's geo-political significance in the war against terror and the rampant Islamization throughout the country. By doing so, they perpetuate the lack of awareness about the rising women's rights movements in Pakistan whose modus operandi ranges from street demonstrations to female-friendly policy drafting and implementation (Critelli and Willett, 2012). Women's movements do not develop in a vacuum and issues that motivate their causes are based on cultural and political climate. They are also heterogeneous because they are embedded in particular histories and geographies. Political fields are dynamic and may change with new state regimes, new economic policies, or the rise of ideologies such as Islam. (*Ibid.*) New strategies have been devised to influence the government and policy makers that involve limited engagement and collaboration with the state alongside mainstream institutions on key issues. Activism has gradually become less street oriented, more diffused and has grown more affiliated with a diverse range of networks. (*Ibid.*)

## Chapter IV

### EXTRACURRICULAR OPTIONS IN SWAT

This chapter serves as the heart of my thesis. I set out on my journey to explore, discover and find answers to the state of affairs of women and girls' extracurricular options in Swat. I always maintained that Swat was not a desert when it came to opportunities and facilities for college girls but I knew that those were few and far between.

When the idea for this thesis first came to me, I reached out to people in Pakistan who I felt would know the answers to at least some of my questions. It turns out that they were as uninformed as I was but nevertheless encouraged me to return to Swat for my field research and find out for myself. My graduate thesis committee provided me with ample suggestions and valuable information for putting together an effective research plan. I was fortunate enough to have my academic advisor, Professor Anita Weiss, join me for a few days during my field research in Swat. Professor Weiss helped point me in the right direction in terms of what kinds of questions to ask in order to amass the most relevant information.

I would like to point out that even though I use the word 'school(s)' in this thesis, I actually mean 'college' in the Pakistan context. In the Pakistani education system, grade 11 and up is considered to be college level. However, there are many examples of educational institutions in Pakistan that still go by the name "school" even though they offer classes up to or beyond grade 11, and I have included those here as well.

I decided to interview students in groups of five even though the enrollment was fairly high for reasons stated in the introduction of this thesis. To build rapport with the

interviewees, I began by mentioning that I was from Saidu Sharif. This was followed by saying my name, the institution where I studied and the purpose of my visit. I would then ask them if they wanted to hear a joke, to which the reply was always in the affirmative. To lighten the mood further, I jokingly remarked that I would have proceeded to tell the joke regardless of whether or not they wanted to hear it. Most of the interviewees responded to this by giggling or briefly applauding. I would ask if everyone present spoke Pashto, which I learned that they are all fluent in. The jokes were appropriate and diplomatic but humorous, judging from the reactions of the interviewees. Their content was local to Swat and I selected them out of several ones that I had heard over the years from my friends and family there.

Below is a list of questions that I asked. This is not exhaustive, given that I did not follow a structured questionnaire:

- Can you tell me your daily routine on a typical school day and weekend?
- What do you enjoy doing in your leisure time?
- Do you participate in extracurricular activities within and outside of school; if so, please elaborate?
- Do you know of any local places within or outside of school that offer extracurricular activities?
- How do you feel about the current state of facilities and opportunities for college girls in Swat?
- How does your family feel about you partaking in extracurricular activities within or outside of school; please elaborate?

### Discussions held at nine schools in Swat

What follows are discussions held at the nine schools I visited in Swat. They are listed in order of my first to last visit while conducting fieldwork for this thesis.

#### **A. Swat Public School (SPS) Girls' Campus:**

This school is the largest private school franchise in Swat and has gender segregated campuses from secondary school to high school. The campus I visited is located in Mingora and is the largest in the valley by area and enrollment. I was informed by a member of its administrative staff that they arrange for the female students to be taken on regular treks around Swat. They have even been taken to the basecamp of K-2 (the world's second highest mountain, located in Baltistan in Pakistan). The school frequently invites notable Pakistani scholars to give talks at seminars to supplement the school curriculum.

After meeting with the principal, I was given permission to meet students of grade 12 in their classroom. In the Pakistani school system, students of grades 11 and 12 are offered to choose between three programs: Sciences, Arts/Humanities or Statistics. As the subjects indicate, these students specialize in their program of choice in addition to taking core courses of English, Urdu, Pakistan Studies and Islamic Studies (for Muslim students) or Civics (for Non-Muslim students).

The students who I interviewed were from the Science section. The class had a total of 20 girls, all of whom were 18 years in age. All of their mothers were homemakers and an overwhelming majority of their fathers were medical doctors. One girl's father was an electrical engineer and two girls' fathers worked as bankers in Saudi Arabia. A

large number of them lived in a joint family household but a considerable number lived in a nuclear family setup.

It was brought to my attention by the girls that there was one non-Muslim girl in class who belonged to the Sikh faith. When I asked the rest of the class why they felt it necessary for me to know that, they said that I seemed “open-minded” and would be happy to learn this. There was only one non-Pakhtun girl in class and also considers Swat as her home. Her parents were from Gujarat (a city in the province of Punjab, Pakistan) but she was born and raised in Swat and is fluent in Pashto.

One of the girls had come all the way from Malakand (a district southwest of Swat). She and her brother were sent by their family to enroll in school and college, respectively, because they believed that Swat provided a better quality of education than Malakand. Another girl maintained a family residence in Islamabad (the federal capital of Pakistan) and goes there with her family on alternate weekends. There was a girl from Waziristan (a region in the tribal belt of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) who is based in Swat with her family and only goes back for the Eid (a Muslim festival) vacation. According to her, there is nothing left for them in Waziristan since it has been a war-torn area for as long as she could remember.

When I asked if they had pets at home, one girl excitedly told me that she had a “Puppy named Jackie” who spends a good part of the day with her after she returns home from school. This served as an ideal ice-breaker for me to proceed to ask what they enjoyed doing once they were done with school for the day. Nearly all the hands in the class shot up. One girl admitted that she was “lazy” and was content with her routine of having lunch, followed by tea and then watching television. She would usually end the

day by playing with her siblings in the lawn of their house and chatting with cousins on her cellphone. One of the girls proudly proclaimed that she had no restrictions to go out of the house to visit female friends whenever she pleased because she had the approval of her parents. This stood in stark contrast to the rest of the class who told me that would visit female friends outside of school only once a month, on average. In the rare event that they met more than once it was usually during a wedding function of mutual friends or family.

The entire class stayed connected outside of school through a group on WhatsApp (an instant messaging app). The content of their virtual communication typically involves discussions related to what they studied in school that day but could not share in class due to a time constraint. They use it as a private and secure platform wherein they can talk about ideas and issues that they have regarding school and their plans for college. The majority of the girls own a personal cellphone but the ones who did not would borrow it from their parents and/or siblings.

They said that they cherished their recreational outings in Swat but found it somewhat bothersome that they were not allowed to go out unless accompanied by their parents or older siblings. I asked if they could tell me why they could not go unescorted, to which the response was that their parents do not find it socially acceptable. Almost all the girls said that they religiously watched Big Boss (an Indian reality television game show) and would keenly share their thoughts about it with each other between lectures at school. They claimed to like it for its entertainment value.

I noticed a similar trend among the girls who came from a joint family background. All of them were in the habit of helping younger siblings and cousins with

their homework and playing sports like badminton and volleyball with their brothers at home. The girls who lived in a nuclear family setup did not have the same experiences as the aforementioned and, unlike them, spent more time with their parents. They mentioned that their parents had designated a time for “general discussion” during which these girls were asked to talk about what they learned in school that day and how that would affect their plans for college. These conversations last between fifteen to twenty minutes and are reserved for every evening from Monday to Friday. The girls added that the time can exceed twenty minutes when they score well in an exam.

A little over half of the class went to tuition centers after school for up to two hours during the school week. The tuition centers that these girls attend are co-educational and are primarily staffed by male teachers. The tutees are enrolled in the same courses that they are taught in school. The primary motive of taking tuition is to improve their knowledge and skills with regard to the school syllabus. According to the girls, they do not feel overworked and wish the tuition programs offered to them were not restricted to the sciences. They each expressed a desire to study at least one subject from the Social Sciences, like Sociology.

I found it very insightful to discover that they felt no immediate need to have a facility like Ophelia’s Place in Swat, despite the revelations stated above. As one girl put it,

Swat is changing for the better. We do not wish to do something that risks going against society. We would prefer to go with the flow because facilities like the one you described [Ophelia’s Place] will be available in due course.

**Key Findings at Swat Public School Girls’ Campus:** There appears to be a collective interest in a public structure that offers after-school extracurricular programs. However,

there is no desire to demand it immediately so as to avoid drawing unnecessary attention from traditionalists in Swat. This kind of concern brings *Bargaining with Patriarchy* (Kandiyoti, 1988) to mind [See discussion in Chapter 2].

### **B. Girls' Degree College, Saidu Sharif:**

This college is the largest public all-girls college in terms of campus size and enrollment in Swat. The majority of the students' fathers are government employees. They want their daughters to attend this college because tuition and overall school expenses are offered at subsidized rates.

I introduced myself to a senior teacher who then lead me towards a group of 15 girls who were seated outside for recess. She informed me that they were the only group available to talk at that time. The girls assured me that they were eager to be interviewed and that I should not worry about disturbing their break. I was told that they were in their first year of the Bachelor of Science program and were all 19 years in age.

When I asked them if their mothers were employed, they all replied in the negative but almost immediately added that some of their sisters were and that they aspire to be as well after graduating. Almost all of them claimed to want a government job like their fathers because of the privilege and subsidized benefits that they involve.

Many of the girls go to *madrassahs* after college for about an hour during the school week. They said that they did this out of their own volition because they wanted to study the *Qur'an* with detailed translations. This is unconventional for *madrassahs* in Pakistan which usually stress more on *hifz* (memorizing the Qur'an in its original Arabic text without translation). The girls wanted to study this because they rejected the extremist brand of Islam which the Swat Taliban insisted was the sole correct version of



the faith. They believed that studying the *Qur'an* in detail in a language which they understand will give them a better comprehension of Islam and their own religious views.

A trait that all the girls had in common was assisting their mothers in household chores after returning home for the day. According to them, they were happy to help out at home because their mothers did so much for their overall wellbeing. Similarly, the girls in their entirety would help their younger siblings with their homework. One of the girls enjoyed it so much that's she was inspired to open her own tuition center where she teaches elementary school children, free of charge. She offers study sessions in general science, English and mathematics for an hour every Monday to Friday - excluding public holidays.

Around two-thirds of the group were registered at a training center that offered courses in information technology (IT). They attended these classes every day, right after college. The classes are co-educational and are taught by a team of male instructors. I asked them the motive behind taking these classes to which they said that they were interested in learning IT. They further explained that IT has helped advance the world and is a powerful tool that should be used more widely in Swat. In addition, it aids them in their college assignments.

One of the girls who lives in the housing accommodation on campus complained to me about the lack of organized sports facilities for women and girls in Swat, including on college campus. Another girl told me that she was an avid hiker but felt conscious when out for long periods of time since it is so rare for a Swati girl to do so unescorted.

Each of the girls in the group agreed that women and girls in Swat should have the availability of well-maintained and secure sports facilities and programs throughout the

valley. They went on to add that the Swat Sports Complex (the largest government-run sports and sporting event center in Swat) has timings designated for females but has failed to circulate the news in Swat.

**Key Findings at Girls' Degree College, Saidu Sharif:** There is an overwhelming demand for extracurricular sports structures and facilities for college girls in Swat. The ill-planned methods of advertisement for available sports programs for females leaves many college girls uninformed and consequently, restricted to their houses when playing sports.

### **C. Al-Madina Academy:**

This is one of the most recent and largest private all-girls schools in Swat and is located in Saidu Sharif. The campus is purposely-built and was undergoing renovations for expansion during the time of my visit. I was given permission by a homeroom teacher to interview students of grade 12 in their classroom. Like those at SPS, they too were students of the science section and were the only ones available for being interviewed. They were 20 in number and all were 18 years in age.

This was the first site of my field research where some of the interviewees' said that their mothers were employed. One girl's mother worked as a teacher in a different school and another girl's mother worked as a medical doctor in Swat. The remainder of the girls' mothers were homemakers. The careers of their fathers ranged from school principals to lawyers to auto parts dealers.

There was a general consensus among the girls on their appreciation for Indian pop culture like Bollywood songs and binge-watching shows like Big Boss. Topics like this make up a good part of their conversations between school classes. Many of the girls

claimed to enjoy playing games on their personal cellphones and find dancing as an effective way to unwind. Less than half of the girls lived in a joint family setup while the remaining number lived in a nuclear family household. Girls from the former group claimed that they did not mind the lack of privacy that a joint family entails and in fact they have relatively more fun listening to music and dancing with their cousins. This usually takes place on alternate evenings, on average. According to the girls, music, dance, and pop culture is reenergizing and gives them something to look forward to during a productive day in school. One girl put it as,

Music and dance are in every Pakhtun's blood. There is nothing wrong with doing things that make you and the people around you smile. We love Bollywood and even have fun watching Hollywood productions like the Barbie cartoon. It would be nice if we could learn how to sing *tapay* [Pashto spoken-word singing] and play the *rubab* [Pakhtun stringed musical instrument] but I do not think that there are places here that offer those courses.<sup>3</sup>

A sizeable number of girls take *Qur'an* classes at *madrassahs* after school, a characteristic they had in common with many of the interviewees at Girls' Degree College, Saidu Sharif. However, unlike the latter group, they studied the historical context of the *Qur'an* in addition to the translation. Their stated reasons for doing so were the same as the interviewees of Girls' Degree College, Saidu Sharif.

One of the girls proudly declared to me that she knew how to drive and drove in the streets of her neighborhood late in the evenings so as not to draw too much attention. She clarified that the traffic was less congested around that time and she found it liberating to have this kind of self-reliance. The rest of the class expressed their desire to go to driving school but regretted the fact that it is still frowned upon for women to drive in Swat, even though it is legal.

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<sup>3</sup> Interviewed at Al-Madina Academy in February, 2018.

**Key Findings at the Al-Madina Academy:** There is a noticeable interest in contemporary mainstream music, dance, reality television, and pop culture. It seems that there is no known local program for females that offers courses in Pakhtun folk art. There is no discernable resistance from college girls to claim their legal rights such as the right to drive freely without the fear of being socially condemned.

**D. Women Business Development Center (WBDC):**

This is an up and coming, female-run and female owned women's welfare organization based in Saidu Sharif. WBDC was founded in 2017 and is a subsidiary of the federal government organization Small – Medium Development Enterprises. This was launched in 2011 and arranges small to medium business loans for people in need.

According to a senior member of staff at WBDC, the most noteworthy project is their Montessori method training program. This project is offered to the administrative staff and faculty of Swat's pre and elementary schools regardless of public or private status. To incentivize schools to partake in the project, they are gifted teaching aids like electronic tablets if they agree to enroll in the Montessori training workshop. A senior member of staff<sup>4</sup> stated,

Our vision is for the Montessori project to be adopted by all the pre and elementary schools of the most populous cities in Swat. Our policy is to let children be children and not subject them to rote learning from textbooks and merely regurgitating information taught to them by their class instructors. The concepts of critical thought and healthy, creative expression are central to our mission. Once the Montessori project gains a strong footing at the junior school level, we aim to expand the program to incorporate the senior school and college levels.

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<sup>4</sup> Interviewed at Women Business Development Center (WBDC) in February, 2018.

She claimed that this was perhaps the only project of WBDC that could potentially make a positive impact in Swat's educational landscape. She expressed dissatisfaction with the fact that to date there has never been a youth forum for young women in Swat. In her opinion, youth forums for young women in Swat would provide them with a space to address their demands and concerns about their education, jobs and/or their life in the domestic sphere, with like-minded individuals.

She added that the bulk of women's development NGOs in Swat do not do much to shift the status quo because they have not introduced anything "innovative" in their projects. Moreover, she disapproves of the notion that education alone is the golden ticket to female emancipation and empowerment. She worded it as,

The women's development NGOs here tend to hold workshops in crafts like embroidery, knitting and garment design. While this does enable women to earn a moderate income and the artistic aspect of these skills does indeed give them a creative outlet, it does little for societal change. Many of the workshop attendees are educated girls who cannot find a job and hence settle for courses like these. This is why Swat is in dire need of a forum where young women can devise ways to educate public opinion and shatter the glass ceiling.

Another popular project of WBDC, albeit more conventional than their Montessori program, are their home-economics classes which are headed by a "master trainer". The classes charge a fee of PKR 2000 (approximately USD 20) per session but are free of charge for women and girls who live below the poverty line. Furthermore, WBDC offers to sell their former clients' products which were taught to them in these classes - that is if they wish to make an income after completing the course.

**Key Findings at WBDC:** The Montessori system of teaching could potentially be adopted by local female colleges in the foreseeable future. The girls here told me that impactful societal change for women and girls' welfare in Swat is better achieved by

teaching vocational skills that are not traditionally associated with women, which could also help them earn a bigger income.

**E. Co-operative Women’s Handicraft Association (CWAH):**

This organization is a subsidiary of the Khidmat-e-Khalk Foundation and runs under its co-operative department. Khidmat-e-Khalk is a Pakistani charity that has a network of offices in various districts of Pakistan and was founded in 1978. It operates 13 other women’s co-operative branches, each of which is administratively uniform but offers intensive training courses in different skills. The Swat chapter of CWAH is located in Saidu Sharif and holds classes for women in textile arts like sewing, embroidery, knitting and the like. It is the only one located in Swat out of the 13 co-operative branches. There are currently over 500 students registered for classes in the Swat chapter. Clients have to be a minimum of 18 years old to be eligible for enrollment however, exceptions are made for illiterate girls in vulnerable social positions. The admission fee is PKR 200 (approximately USD 2) and the monthly charges are PKR 300 (approximately USD 3). In total, the classes are covered within a period of 3 months and are divided into 4 sessions per year.

I met with the president of the Swat chapter of CWAH who detailed the administrative setup at the provincial and district levels. According to her, the chapter is supervised by a managing body based in Peshawar (provincial capital of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa). The chapter is overlooked by a president, vice-president, secretary, and a treasurer. Every month, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa’s district chapters are called to meet in Peshawar where they must provide a progress report. A “general body meeting” is held

on an annual basis in a major city of Pakistan but can meet biannually if the managing bodies see fit.

A considerable number of students come from the adjoining districts of Buner and Chitral and stay in Swat for the entire duration of the course period. This temporary move to Swat is caused by the lack of opportunities in their home districts. After the completion of the course, the girls are given a loan from a co-operative bank which enables them to set up a small-scale entrepreneurship in textile design. In the general body meeting over thirty years ago, in 1986, it was decided that the potential students who found it difficult to come to Saidu Sharif for whatever reason may be accommodated by government-owned vocational centers in a more feasible part of Swat. These vocational centers hold the same classes but have different instructors than the ones in Saidu Sharif. The president<sup>5</sup> claimed,

CWHA's aim is to help the women of Swat to become financially independent and simultaneously foster better community engagement. We attain this goal by urging former clients to become members of committees at the village level, which they can establish and operate independent of CWHA's administrative rules and regulations. At least half of our clients are educated women who want to hone their skills in textile design, earn a moderate living and enjoy a sense of community.

**Key Findings at the Co-operative Women's Handicraft Association:** There is a detectable need for a sense of community among the women and girls of Swat, which results in joining safe public spaces like CWHA.

**F. Sarhad Rural Support Program (SRSP):**

This is the largest NGO in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and focuses on poverty alleviation, enabling sustainable means of livelihood and safeguarding women's and children's rights. It was founded in 1989 and has an office branch in Saidu Sharif, Swat.

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<sup>5</sup> Interviewed at Co-operative Women's handicraft Association (CWHA) in February, 2018.

Their most successful project in Swat is the Village Bank's Community Investment Fund. The Village Bank grants loans worth PKR 5-10,00000 (approximately USD 3731.79 – 7463.59) to women who wish to open a startup. I introduced myself to the head of the Swat branch who subsequently agreed to meet me in his office.

I was informed by him that there was no known permanent arrangement of structures like Ophelia's Place in Swat. He was critical about the poor publicity of existing after-school facilities for college girls in Swat. This argument mirrored the one put forth by the interviewees at Girls' Degree College, Saidu Sharif. According to him, there is a lot of potential and sufficient resources to successfully launch initiatives like Ophelia's Place but unfortunately these are not prioritized by the government. Furthermore, community development bodies in Swat need to better organize themselves in order to maintain and better publicize their programs for college girls.

He added that the federal and provincial governments have entire ministries that are dedicated to female prosperity in theory, but not yet in practice. The government has a budget for after-school projects and ought to do more with involving both the public and private sector to fulfill their agenda. Transport is a big concern for girls who cannot afford to pay the fare and/or fuel expenses and keeps them from visiting places which offer extracurricular programs. This issue can be resolved if the government authorizes its schools and colleges to donate at least one bus to such places once the school and college activities conclude for the day. Additionally, these places should be monitored by a government supervisory committee at least twice a month to ensure that they are adequately run. The government must take stricter action against the appointed employees for this task who shirk their responsibilities. The current trend is for



government employees to be suspended for a maximum period of one month before they return to the same job position. If the government displays this kind of seriousness, it would help fulfill their gender equality agenda more effectively and efficiently. He<sup>6</sup> asserted that,

The most critical need of the hour is to unblock mental barriers. Swat does not need as many material resources as much as it needs to incentivize its people and win mass communal support which allows spaces like Ophelia's Place to thrive.

He went on to tell me about the history of safe public spaces for women and girls in Swat and said,

The best social and leisure activities for women and girls was going to the neighborhood wells and springs to draw water. Their male relatives knew not to disturb them at this time, thus these sites became reserved as places for these women and girls to have meaningful exchanges or voice their concerns. These wells and springs were to women and girls what *hujras* [a private drawing room exclusively for men, in Pakhtun culture] are to Pakhtun men. This community arrangement died out after modern water supply networks were introduced in the valley in recent decades. The women and girls who would frequent the wells and springs have now lost a safe public space as well as a significant component of their culture. A facility like Ophelia's Place in Swat will help them reclaim what was lost.

**Key Findings at SRSP:** The women and girls of Swat had traditionally designated public spaces in the past, like wells. The general public in Swat needs to be better informed about the importance of reclaiming female public spaces, which includes having structures like Ophelia's Place.

#### **G. Da Khwendo Jirga:**

A *jirga* is a customary Pakhtun tribal assembly traditionally of male elders for settling disputes within Pakhtun communities, based on *Pakhtunwali*, the Pakhtun code of conduct. Pakhtun women have traditionally been excluded from this role and from

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<sup>6</sup> Interviewed at Sarhad Rural Support Program (SRSP) in February, 2018.

participating in *jirgas*. Da Khwendo Jirga (The Sisters' Council) was founded by the Swati social activist Tabassum Adnan in 2013. Tabassum is the first woman to have served as a member of an otherwise all-male *jirga* council.

The idea for Da Khwendo Jirga first came to her when she saw how the non-Pakhtun media in Pakistan and the international media criticized *jirgas* for being outdated and 'kangaroo courts.' Tabassum strongly opposes this notion and credits *jirgas* for preventing the Swat Taliban from gaining a strong foothold in Kalam (a sub-valley in Northern Swat). According to her, the Swat Taliban succeeded in taking over the rest of Swat because of the trivialization of and decrease in Swat's *jirga* culture. She believed it was high time that a similar arrangement was made for Pakhtun women who could use *jirgas* as a decision-making platform for themselves and other Pakhtun women.

Tabassum reflects on 'the glory days' of the Swat state as a time when women and girls would organize and participate freely in the *Srai Mela* (Srai Carnival), the largest carnival in Swat which was exclusively for women and children. This was held annually in the Srai neighborhood of Saidu Sharif. In addition, the state would arrange walks for both male and female students along the more scenic fringes of Saidu Sharif. It is difficult to imagine having events of this nature in present day Swat without tight security arrangements and heavy gender segregation.

Tabassum notifies Swati women and girls about Da Khwendo Jirga's gatherings by word of mouth. She visits some prospective participants in their houses and requests them to spread the gatherings' details among women and girls who might be interested to gain more credibility. Tabassum opines that digitized program announcements will not give her the same amount of trust. The locations of the gatherings are based on the decisions

of the prospective participants who she visits. She suggests a particular location and asks if they feel comfortable about going there or will be allowed to go. The location is only finalized if the majority of the prospective participants answer in the affirmative.

Tabassum claimed that,

Da Khwendo Jirga wants to include as many Swati women and girls as we can. We will not rest until all of them feel heard. So many of the participants are college girls who complain about the social stigma and resulting uneasiness which they feel when stepping out of the house alone or even with their college friends. It is ridiculous that even today it is only socially acceptable for young girls to leave the house for attending weddings and funerals. They really have no public place to go to just be young and carefree.

**Key Findings at Da Khwendo Jirga:** Traditional and customary male dominated practices can be altered to include women and girls. In fact, doing away with them can cause more harm than good. The enthusiastic participation in a *jirga* for women and girls underscores their need for claiming community space.

#### **H. Girls United for Human Rights (GUHR):**

GUHR is a group of 10 female social activists who are in their late teens and serve under the Swati human rights NGO, The Awakening. These girls attend the same college and spend the late afternoons working towards ending child marriages, promoting education for all, and opposing harassment against women and girls.

I met the leader of this group at the office of The Awakening, located in Saidu Sharif. I learned that GUHR request their fellow female students in college to go to visit their neighbors and educate them about the cause. GUHR frequently contacts Swat's city development authorities to demand the installation of proper street lights and CCTV cameras to make their cities safer and reduce street harassment. GUHR's most impressive mode of action is convincing local *imams* (the prayer leaders at mosques) to decry child

marriages in their sermons. In addition to this, they use the medium of street theatre to perform plays which emphasize the importance of their mission.

**Key Findings at GUHR:** Girls on their own are opting to become involved with human rights activities in Swat, and communicate why these are significant problems in inventive ways. Meeting with religious leaders as well as performing in street theatre is a good way to effect positive social change in Swat.

### **I. Swat College of Science and Technology (SCST):**

SCST is an all-girls college which offers academic programs in MSc and BSc. The available curriculum includes but is not limited to Zoology, Medical Sciences, Computer Sciences, and Physical Education. It is one of the highest-ranking girls' colleges in terms of academic performance and is located in Mingora, Swat. In 2015, when former prime minister of Pakistan, Nawaz Sharif, launched a post-conflict rehabilitation program for women and girls in Swat, he selected SCST as the site for the program because of its repute in Swat.

The program provides vocational, intensive training courses in IT, English, Chinese, medical nurse assistance, cosmetology, and fashion designing. These classes are held every Monday to Saturday (excluding public holidays) from 2 pm to 6 pm. The schedule for regular classes in SCST are from 8 AM to 1:30 PM Monday to Friday. Each vocational course is 6 months in duration and prospective students have to be over 18 years in age to register. The regular students of SCST are eligible to apply as well. On average, 600 – 700 prospective students apply for one course from all over Swat but only 50 get accepted. The selection committee consists of individuals appointed by the government, many of whom are based in Peshawar. The most financially vulnerable

applicants are given first priority. The rejected applicants are then put on a waiting list and are selected to replace those students who leave the program or are offered to switch to an available course. There is also the option of being inducted through self-finance. This opportunity is often availed by college students.

The selected applicants receive a stipend of PKR 3,000 (approximately USD 30) and are given a “kit” after receiving their course certification. The kit is meant to help them start a career in the course in which they are certified. I introduced myself to the president of SCST who gave me an informative tour of the classes and let me interact with the students.

Most of the students found out about this program from newspaper advertisements and word of mouth, usually suggested by a friend. A considerable number of them carpool with friends to avoid transportation costs. The most sought after course in the program is cosmetology. The instructor for cosmetology is a professional cosmetologist, but still had to undergo a 3-month training course before she could teach the class.

According to her,

All of my students have gone on to open their beauty salons in Swat. Cosmetology is in high demand in Swat because prior to this program, women would have to go all the way to Peshawar or Islamabad for esthetic services. Not many women could afford this and had to settle for makeshift and subpar salons which were usually located in houses. It is so rewarding to know that some of my students are young widows or single mothers, many of whom are illiterate but have a chance to make something of their lives.

The medical nurse assistance course includes ultrasound technician training. One of the students told me that she wanted to be an ultrasound technician because she is a mother under immense societal pressure to produce a son. She disclosed that,

I wish to become an ultrasound technician because it upsets me to see the disappointment or at times, anger, on people’s faces when they find out that a

female family member is about to have a daughter. There is no place for son preference in the twenty-first century. I will use my position to make the proponents of son preference understand that daughters are nothing less than a blessing.

The IT course trains students in software features like Microsoft, website design, graphic design, among many others. The president of SCST informed me that the keenness exhibited by the students to explore more facets in IT prompted him to develop a course in artificial intelligence technology. The course is currently at the rudimentary stage and is being designed by the president of SCST and a team of specialists in the field.

The majority of the students in the fashion designing course want to open their own boutique upon receiving their course certification. A student explained,

I have always been fascinated by fashion but could never imagine having a career in it. Growing up, we only had tailors whose designs were very run-of-the-mill. There is a lack of female tailors in Swat so most of the women resort to choosing male tailors. Many of them are uncomfortable with male tailors taking their body measurements because there are so many cases of women and girls having been touched inappropriately. They will never have to worry about that in my future boutique.

**Key Findings at SCST:** SCST is the most similar to Ophelia's Place out of all the research sites that I visited. A trait which it shares with a couple of other local, after-school extracurricular facilities is its vetting process. Moreover, enrolled students are trained with the intention of securing their future career prospects rather than providing them with a safe space to maximize their after-school student experience.

The sites mentioned in this chapter, listed on Table 4.1, are the only ones which I am aware of that are related to the goals of my thesis. I would hesitate to call this an exhaustive list of extracurricular options in Swat given that these facilities and opportunities are not well publicized.

#	Name of Institution or Organization	Number of People Interviewed
1	Swat Public School (SCST) Girls' Campus	20
2	Girls' Degree College, Saidu Sharif	15
3	Al-Madina Academy	20
4	Women Business Development Center (WBDC)	1
5	Co-operative Women's Handicraft Association (CWAHA)	1
6	Sarhad Rural Support Program (SRSP)	1
7	Da Khwendo Jirga	1
8	Girls United for Human Rights (GUHR)	1
9	Swat College of Science and Technology (SCST)	50

**Table 4.1.** List of Institutions and Organizations and Number of People Interviewed

In the next chapter of this thesis, Chapter 5, I propose a solution and alternatives for after-school extracurricular options of the college girls of Swat.

## Chapter V

### CONCLUSION: A MARRIAGE MADE IN HEAVEN:

#### THE MASKAN INSTITUTE AS AN IDEAL SITE

As mentioned earlier, the first girls' school in Swat was opened in 1926. Although girls were being provided with an education, the tribal Pakhtun mindset did not readily allow females to join the workforce and become financially independent. The birth of a boy was celebrated and that of a girl was a moment of indifference at best and sadness at worst. This mindset was still prevalent through the decade of the 1960s. A girl with living parents was marginalized and 'othered.' Orphan girls were even more at-risk and vulnerable, and their best option at the time was to be a maid in a house of a well-to-do landlord (Swatnama, 2018).

The wali's daughter-in-law, Begum Naseem Aurangzeb, recognized this reality and realized that she should do something about it. In 1966, Begum Aurangzeb visited a girl's orphanage in Jerusalem where the idea came to her to build a similar institution in Swat. Upon return, she started work on the project and approached the wali who agreed to be the patron-in-chief of the institution. He provided the building and the land to house the girls. A governing board was constituted with Begum Aurangzeb as the president and the institute was named Maskan, meaning "home" in Urdu. On 8 September 1968, Maskan opened its doors with 16 orphan girls.

Gradually, donations were sought and given by organizations such as UNICEF, various embassies (Kuwait, Saudi Arabia USA via USAID, the British High Commission) and others based in Islamabad. In addition, generous contributions were made by local and foreign charitable organizations. Through its history, Maskan has been



upgraded from time to time, with a significant uplift funded by the embassy of Japan in the 1990s (Swatnama, 2018).

Maskan's philosophy is to house, educate, train, capacity-build, and create awareness among its resident girls to be able to join the work force after completing their studies. With this comes the confidence that they had been deprived of in their domestic environment.

Today, Maskan houses about fifty orphaned girls who are enrolled in school from kindergarten to grade 10 and three girls who are enrolled in a nearby public college (Swatnama, 2018). It now has over 800 alumni who have been housed and educated there. Most have then gone on to have careers and become financially independent. Many of them have become teachers, school principals and administrators in the Swat District's Department of Education (Swatnama, 2018). This is no small feat considering the background from where these girls came.

After Begum Aurangzeb passed away in 2000, her son Adnan Aurangzeb – my father -- assumed the responsibility of keeping the institute going, as per the philosophy of his mother. The most difficult period was during the Taliban insurgency in Swat (2008 - 2009). Fearing for the safety of the girls, he decided to close Maskan for three months (May – July, 2009); the girls were sent to live either with their own relatives or with other arrangements that he made.

Since Maskan exists solely by donations, during the Taliban insurgency people stopped contributing to it, thereby forcing the Institute to go through hard financial times. Since Swat began to rebuild, Maskan has gained a sound financial footing. The quality of the education being imparted to the girls has vastly improved so that during the daytime

they attend a nearby public school and every evening are tutored by private teachers for an hour. This has led them to achieve distinguished academic performance in their school. Maskan also houses a library where they have access to laptops which can be used as study and recreational tools (Swatnama, 2018). Maskan today enjoys a highly favorable reputation in the Swat valley.

The Maskan Institute celebrated its golden jubilee in 2018. Since its inception, a substantially large number of girls have had to be turned away because they did not meet the criterion of being orphans. These girls were usually brought by their biological parents who were settled in remote parts of Swat. They requested that an exception be made for their daughters on the grounds that they did not have access to good schools and a safe living accommodation in their hometowns. They saw Maskan as being their only hope for a better life and a secure future for their daughters, given its track record of producing high achieving students and successful alumni who have excelled in their respective fields. Moreover, Maskan bears testimony to the glory days of the Swat state and is the most reputable orphanage for girls in the valley. Its central location and easy accessibility in Saidu Sharif makes it even more in demand among Swatis who wish to admit their girls there. It is within walking distance from a busy, reputable hospital and thriving market and is situated next to the highest concentration of safe neighborhoods in Saidu Sharif.

In the past fifty years, Maskan simply did not have the requisite financial means and resources to exempt non-orphans from its criterion for admission. In 2018, however, Maskan finally reached a point of financial stability. It has expanded with up-to-date facilities due to plentiful investment by charitable organizations and international

diplomatic circles within Pakistan. The generous and encouraging response from donors resulted in a plan for additional infrastructural renovation and expansion of Maskan's building. The plan for renovation reached fruition early in the summer of 2018 with the kitchen being named 'Emilia's Kitchen' in honor of Madam Emilia Szabo, the spouse of the Hungarian ambassador Istvan Szabo who has been a generous donor to Maskan.

The structural design of Maskan is a single-story quadrangle with verandas which open into a courtyard. The courtyard serves as a playground with ride sets, a basketball court and a manicured garden with floral plants and evergreen trees. The entire quadrangle contains the administrative office, the matrons' room, the girls' dormitories, bathrooms, laundry room, kitchen, dining room, television lounge, library, computer laboratory, and study spaces. There is a plot of land by one section of the quadrangle which is the designated site for Maskan's building expansion.

After conducting extensive research on the subject of extracurricular programs for college girls in Swat and foreseeing the positive change that the expansion of Maskan could bring to the lives of non-orphan girls, I have arrived at the conclusion that a structure similar to Ophelia's Place in Swat can be built and run successfully in the aforementioned empty plot.

The project which I am proposing is informed by the insights and revelations that were provided to me by the interviewees in this research, as discussed above in Chapter 4. I have gathered and observed the need and demand for an area to play organized sports and other outdoor recreational programs. Additionally, I have been made aware of the demand for learning various Pakhtun musical instruments, Pashto singing and traditional dancing. College-age girls want enhanced opportunities to learn how to use computers

and the internet so as to be connected with the rest of the world and learn valuable job-related skills. Importantly, girls will only avail these opportunities in an environment that is widely considered to be safe, secure and reputable, such as Maskan's. For all these reasons, I envision expanding Maskan to make these programs available to both the resident girls of Maskan and other college-age girls who desire to partake in these activities.

The new building extension can include various new facilities that I have heard college girls in Swat say they would like to be able to access. A considerable number of interviewees complained about not having a safe and high-standard, public facility for playing team sports. As a result of this shortcoming, they had to resort to playing within the confines of their houses' boundary walls. Another complaint was about the social restrictions on college girls visiting each other's houses thus, only being able to play these sports with relatives. Brainstorming about what is possible, I anticipate there will be an indoor gymnasium with ample room and equipment for popular organized sports like volleyball, indoor football (American soccer), tennis, and other team activities. This gymnasium will finally provide college-age girls with a place where they can participate in team sports with their friends in a safe, socially-sanctioned environment.

These girls also told me that they want after-school opportunities to hone their computer skills. The IT culture in Swat proliferated a few years after the end of the Taliban insurgency in the valley. Up to seventy percent of interviewees told me that they were either already enrolled in or want to enroll in a program which offers IT training. They find it important to develop skills in IT regardless of their area of study. So in response, I anticipate constructing a state-of-the art computer lab that will enhance the

already existing computer facilities at Maskan by providing additional laptops and instruction in advanced usage of various programs.

The art of music, singing and dancing has always been celebrated in Pakhtun culture. The Swat Taliban attempted to suppress it (Buneri, 2012). However, despite this, it is not socially acceptable for Pakhtun females to perform publicly, and especially not in the presence of males. Many interviewees expressed to me that such restrictions leave little room for Pakhtun females to practice traditional performing arts. Maskan could provide a music and dance studio stocked with a variety of Pakhtun musical instruments. A multimedia projector could be used to learn how to play Pakhtun musical instruments, singing and dancing.

The most important component of this new building takes direct inspiration from Ophelia's Place. It will be a spacious, furnished room with a kitchenette and an arts and crafts station. This will be used as a place to unwind and exchange meaningful conversations about the girls' studies and life in general. It will also be used to organize guest lectures about current affairs and career opportunities for girls.

Outdoor recreational activities for females in Swat are scarce. The social restrictions placed on Pakhtun females' mobility outside the house makes it almost impossible for college girls to be comfortable during such outings. A good number of interviewees said that they felt frustrated and confined because they did not have the freedom to go out without feeling self-conscious. In response, I propose making an indoor rock climbing wall, complete with safety measures such as a padded floor and a first-aid facility.

Maskan's expansion and new priorities will be widely advertised on Swat's media outlets, especially on local radio stations given that many people do not own comparatively more expensive television sets. Furthermore, individuals who are illiterate cannot comprehend print media as well as they can radio announcements.

The resident girls of Maskan will be given priority for space availability in the rooms. In the event of the rooms reaching maximum capacity, the college girls who arrive later will be given incentives to return the next workday. These can be in the form of Maskan merchandise like mugs or snack foods such as a bag of assorted nuts, the results of girls working in income-earning crafts classes.

Girls participating in afterschool activities at Maskan have the potential to be the architects of a more inclusive and female-friendly Swat. The Maskan expansion project is just one step in that direction but their gusto and willingness to build a brighter Swat makes me confident that this may be just the first of many in the valley.

In conclusion, we have seen that there is sufficient reason to believe that this project will be a success. There are no anticipated risks considering that I did not experience any hesitation or opposition from any of the interviewees while proposing a space like Ophelia's Place in Swat.

A likely follow-up project in the foreseeable future is letting the mothers or female guardians of the resident and non-orphan girls at Maskan partake in these activities with their daughters or wards. This move will foster healthy mother-daughter or female guardian-ward relationships and give them a safe environment outside their home setting to spend quality time together. Ophelia's Place has been successfully doing this for years and it is high time that Swat had this opportunity as well.

## APPENDIX



Achievement certificates displayed in the administrative office, Co-operative Women's Handicraft Association. Photo by author.



Items made by trainees, on display at the Women's Business Development Center. Photo by author.



A Swati news feature on the Maskan Institute: Aerial View of the Maskan Institute Site (Top Left); Main Entrance of the Maskan Institute Before Undergoing Renovation (Top Right); Booklet on the Maskan Institute, c. 1960s (Bottom Left); Begum Naseem Aurangzeb (center) at the Orphanage in Jerusalem which Inspired her to open the Maskan Institute (Bottom Right). Source: [www.swatnama.com](http://www.swatnama.com).



Cake cutting in honor of the Maskan Institute's Golden Jubilee celebrations showing President of the Maskan Institute, Adnan Aurangzeb, the Ambassador of Hungary Istvan Szabo (blue, full-sleeved shirt) and Madam Emilia Szabo (center). Source: The Embassy of Hungary, Islamabad, Pakistan.



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