

WOMEN STRUGGLE FOR EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT: AN ANALYSIS OF WOMEN'S EDUCATION IN POST CONFLICT ERA IN SWAT VALLEY, PAKISTAN**Dr. Saeeda Khan**PhD in Gender Studies from University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur
Email: sdkhan.1988@gmail.com**Abstract**

Women's education was under attack by militants in the Swat valley. Violence against schoolgirls by the militants in the Swat valley of Pakistan along-with the two phases of military operation (2007 and 2009) and displacement of Swat residents created a negative atmosphere for women's education. This study addresses the experiences of schoolgirls during conflict and post-conflict situations. In a post-conflict situation, women faced challenges in gaining their position in the field of education. The study is based on the analysis of 13 semi-structured interviews with undertaken with Pakhtun women (women representing Pakhtun tribe) selected through snowball sampling technique from two tehsils of Swat Valley, who have continued their struggle for continuing their education in the post-conflict situation. The study examined the experiences of these women under the conditions of patriarchal system [Pakhtunwali] and militancy by using the concepts from Bourdieu's theory of practice. The collected information was analyzed qualitatively under different themes to clarify the issue under study. It suggests that women of Swat overcome the status of being a victim of militancy to agents of change. Despite their vulnerabilities in the situations created by conflict and culture, these young women struggled to bring positive change in their lives.

Keywords: Militancy, Women's education, Swat valley, Theory of practice, Pakhtun**1. Introduction**

Swat became a part of Pakistan as a settled district on 28 July, 1969, and it has been the third largest district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan. Saidu Sharif is the headquarters of the district whereas Mingora is the main city and an economic hub District Swat. According to the 2017 National Census of Pakistan, the total population of Swat is about 2.3 million, with a 51:50 male-female sex ratio (Adnan, 2019), with majority of the population belongs to the *Yusafzai* tribe of Pakhtuns. They speak the *Pashto* language and have their unwritten code of conduct known as *Pakhtunwali*, which can be understood as 'the way Pakhtuns life and living' (Rzehak, 2011). Pakhtun social structure is mostly patriarchal (male-dominated), whereas men's honour and strength are of great value inside *Pakhtunwali*, while women are considered weaker and dependent on men (Kakar, 2004). The gender norms of Pakhtun are majorly governed by the *ghayrat* (chivalry), *nang* (bravery), *sharam* (shame), *pardah*, *haya* (modesty) *namus* (honour). While the other norms of Pakhtunwali include *melmasitiya* (hospitality), *jirga* (male council), *nanawati* (seeking refugee), *badal* (revenge), *tureh* (bravery) (Barth, 1965; Kakar, 2004; Khan & Iram Bashir, 2017; Lindholm, 1982; Rzehak, 2011).

Women's education is the principal agent of effective change in society and a basic factor of national development. This phenomenon was very prominent during the princely regime of Swat. Education for both men and women were highly encouraged by him (Fleishner, 2011). The first public school for girls was established in 1926, soon he was awarded by power. The importance of women's education can be evaluated from this that, he authorized his troops to visit every house in

the valley and order the girls to join the school. In case of rejection or objection to this order, the male guardians of these girls were instructed to be subjected to physical punishment. In 1949, Mian Abdul Wadood handed over the state rule to his son Mian Abdul Haq Jehanzeb, who was famous as '*Wali sahib*'. He was the last *wali* of Swat valley. *Wali Sahib* uphold the development achieved by his father, he also gives priority to education and established more schools (Fleishner, 2011; Sultan-i-Rome, 2008). Those who receive distinctions in schools were used to be supported by Swat state, for higher education anywhere in the world. The improvement in education regardless of gender distinguished Swat from its neighboring states, allowing it to develop and modernize. The 1951 cense of Pakistan confirmed that the Swat valley has the highest literacy rate for females in its surrounding Pakhtun territory (Sultan-i-Rome, 2008). Unfortunately, after 1970 when Swat merged with Pakistan the investment in education sector faced decline. The history of women education in Swat has experienced the pro-women education policy during its princely era as one extreme, while another extreme as the anti-women agenda as the opposition of women's education by the militants during their regime.

The armed conflict along with other numerous consequences also impacted women's education in District Swat, and has been a focus of research in gender and development related studies (Bekalo, Brophy, & Welford, 2003; Buvinić, DasGupta, & Shemyakina, 2014; Shepler & Routh, 2012; Tahiraj, 2010; Valente, 2014). This study argues that in talibanization women and women related services had been subject to damage and vulnerabilities and concentration on their restoration require particular focus from relevant stakeholders and policy makers. This study also considers women as agents of change in post-conflict situations, and it has been focused that during 2007-2010, militancy in the Swat valley of Pakistan, negatively impacted women's education, and also investigating the struggle of women return to education in the post-conflict situation. Further, this study will examine the participation of Swat's women in education during post-conflict Swat valley, through the experiences of girls who were enrolled in secondary school at the time of conflict (2007-2010). This study contributes to the ongoing discussion on women's education and their struggle for attaining higher education in conflict and post-conflict circumstances.

1.2. Literature Review

Women of Swat enjoyed a better social status as compared to women from other parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Since Swat was a princely state women were provided freedom and accesses to education, health, and other facilities, while they were also given the freedom to choose singing and dancing as a career (Buneri, 2011, p. 74). Besides, when Swat was princely state girls even enjoyed swimming in a tributary of River Swat (Buneri, 2011, p. 81). The women of Swat actively participated in professions like teaching, school administration, medical nursing, and medicine (especially gynaecology and paediatrics). After partition in 1947, the Pakistani government employed a large number of Swat's female teachers in schools of the Northern Province (Adnan, 2019), while men of Swat were liberal in allowing women for education and joining the workforce. However, being a Pakhtun society, women in Swat also led their life under the Pakhtun code of life and observed strict *pardah* in their daily life. *Purdah* is usually practiced when the girls reach puberty and since that time they wear the traditional shawl (*parrunay*) (mostly a white colour fabric covering the head and body). *Parrunay* is worn when going out of home or other communal places where men are also present, because it is commonly believed that Pakhtun women must keep their face cover outside their home (Buneri, 2012).

Besides, women of Swat also participate in income generation through the production of handicrafts, embroidery, midwifery, animal husbandry, post-harvest handling, herbal health therapy (Adnan, 2019). There has been a shift in social status of women after 1969, while their social status was further deteriorated by the militants when they declared a ban on women's mobility and access

to education (Buneri, 2012). The militants issued a *fatwa* against women's employment, and again women were forced to observe *purdah* and must be accompanied by a male relative if leaving home. It restricted and limited the access of women to basic needs such as health, education, financial and economic opportunities. Along with it, the militants used suicide bombers to target all the public spaces where women could go, such as markets, their workplaces, schools, and health centers.

This movement was against democracy, judiciary, parliament, and pluralism, and they also declared female education as 'un-Islamic' and advised women to stay inside their home. As the militant were involved in violence (killing, beheadings and kidnappings), and they have acquired social status, power and wealth through their violence and control (Hilali, 2009). Thus, they set January 15, 2009 as a deadline for banning female education in the Swat valley, and announced it through their illegal FM radio channel that all government and private education institutes shall be shut down otherwise their institutions will be bombed, and violators would face death, also the school going girls will face acid attacks on their faces. Later on they lifted the ban for the first four grades of school, but still parents were not willing to send their daughters to school (IRIN, 2009). Although, gender oppression has been a feature of war throughout history, however; in Swat it became a focal point when the destruction of girls' schools and attacks on working women took place at larger scale (Avis, 2016). Conflict in Swat can be called the war on female education (Hassan, 2009; Khattak, 2018). In this regard, militants destroyed 440 schools in Swat during their insurgency, among that 70 percent were girls schools (Ali, 2010b), whereas during the military operation against militants in 2009, more than 500 schools were either fully destroyed or partially damaged. The massive destruction has deprived approximately 150,000 students of education and left 8,000 women teachers jobless (Ali, 2010a; Basher, Ullah, Shafi, & Shah, 2014; Zafar, 2011). As Weiss (2013, p.179) suggests that education is the major component of women's empowerment; it is a basic right as well as suggests opportunities that nurture them intellectually and socially. Militants targeted it for building an aggressive control over women, to remove women from the workforce, and were admonished to wear the shuttlecock "*burqa*".

3. Objective of the Study

The major objectives of this study are:

- To find if women are agents of change in post conflict situation.
- To find the impact of militancy in the Swat valley of Pakistan during 2007-2010 on women's education.
- To understand the struggle of women of Swat valley for returning to education in the post-conflict situation.

4. Theoretical Framework

The struggle of women to return to their schools in a post-conflict situation transforms them from the status of being a victim to agents of change. In order to develop a broader understanding of the issue I have employed Pierre Bourdieu's (1990) theory of practice. This theory incorporates three major concepts: field, habitus, and capital. It will provide an understanding of the relationship between structure and agency through the notion of habitus, field, and capital. The relationship between structure and agency is perceived as an important concept in sociology. It helps to position individual actions inside their suitable social context. Bourdieu (1990) suggests that practices are produced when there is an interaction between the individual's habitus and the capital that each individual brings to the field. According to Bourdieu (1986) capital can be economic, social, cultural, and symbolic. As each individual has a unique and unequal amount of capital, competition for positions exists among the individuals of the field and this unequal distribution of capital also leads to

conflicts and struggles. Bourdieu (1990) define the field as a structured system composed of structured spaces of objective positions by an individual or group of individuals. It is thus a domain of forces, where the boundaries are set by specific logic and degree of influence on other fields. Individuals inside the field require a struggle for maintaining their position in the field and accumulate more capital or expand the boundaries of the field (Bourdieu, 2001; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

The other concept of Bourdieu's theory of practice is habitus, which is 'durable and transposable dispositions', it is both a system of schemes of production of practices and a system of perception and appreciation of practices (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 19). It functions as a principle of action, enabling individuals to know how to behave in a particular field. The actions of individuals shape the habitus of the field. According to Bourdieu (1997), gender is a fundamental dimension of habitus. For instance, Pakhtun women know what the norms of Pakhtunwali expect from them and they accept many restrictions without knowing them. Bourdieu refers to it as '*doxa*', it shapes the bounds of practice. Bourdieu (1990, 2001) defines *doxa* as a set of fundamental beliefs that are embodied in the agents of habitus as a result of experiences across social situations. Militants imposed a ban on female education and enforced purdah, it was accepted by women only for surviving, it does not mean that they were completely bound by these orders. According to Bourdieu's concepts in the theory of practice, in this study education for women is classed as a field, where female participation is restricted by militants in the conflict period, and other socioeconomic factors coupled with patriarchy in the post-conflict period. Capital within this field comprised the availability of school, support by the family members, economic resources, and personal motivation for education. The foregoing discussion of Bourdieu's theory of practice is used to analyze the experiences of women who struggled for education during conflict and post-conflict situations. If women's education was perceived as an un-Islamic phenomenon, what was their experience of returning to schools after the conflict? Further, was the prejudice of women staying inside the four walls of their home as widespread as during militancy? How these young women resisted the challenges in their struggle for education? I have explored these questions are explored in detail in this study.

5. Research Methodology

The study was qualitative in nature for which explicit criteria was adopted for selection of participants. The selection criteria of participants include: be the resident of Swat, enrolled in education institutes at Swat, have experienced the militancy, have been displaced during the conflict (2007-2010), have stopped education during the conflict (2007-2010), was enrolled in secondary school at the time of militancy, and have continued their education in the post-conflict era. The age group of the participants was from 18 to 24 years. The area of study for this research is tehsil Matta and tehsil Khwazakhela of Swat valley as in these tehsils there was strong control of militancy and the immense destruction of the education system in these tehsils.

Further the participants were selected through snowball sampling technique and the collection of data ended at the point of saturation reached. Primary information was collected from a sample of 13 participants through semi-structured interviews carried out using interview guide, while data was collected during June to August 2014. The interview guide was divided into two parts. The first part was based on general the general information of the respondents, while the second part include open ended questions based on the objectives of the study. In social sciences research, the reliability and validity of research are a prime concern (Chavez, 2008). According to (Geleta, 2014) even the outcome of the research is associated with the political and cultural identity of the researcher. In this case, I positioned myself within Denzin's (1997) interpretive stance, according to which researcher him/herself is part of the research. Being a Pakhtun woman myself, my understanding of the local culture and language has contributed to encompassing my analysis. It also enabled me to have smooth interaction with these women. For ethical consideration, prior consent was taken of the participants and they were informed about study purpose and objectives.

Their permission was asked for audio recording the interview. Further, the issues of confidentiality and anonymity of the participants was assured through replacing their real names with pseudonyms. The participants were also assured that their interviews would be used only for academic purposes.

The results of this study were analyzed for common themes relating to the objectives of this study, using Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic approach. As all the participants were Pakhtun hence, all the interviews were conducted in the *Pashto* language, that were later translated to the English language for analysis. From the translated interviews initial codes were generated. The narratives were carefully studied and analyzed around the themes that emerged from them. Those narratives that have similar codes were clustered and were categorized into groups. These groups were later merged to generate sub-themes leading to main themes in the final stage. The main themes are discussed as the major findings of this study.

5. Findings

5.1. Reasons for dropout from School

With the increasing influence of the militancy in Swat valley, female education continues to decline. Ban on female education was a part of the agenda of the militants. Most of the women interviewed demonstrated a fear of attacks on schoolgirls. It was a major reason highlighted by the majority of women. They talked about how they were forcefully dropped out of school. Some women were stopped from going to school even before the ban on female education by the militants. Many girls were dropout from school by their parents because of the attacks on girls' schools.

“Although the situation was not so worse, but the militants were in action in some parts of Swat. I and my younger sister were dropped out of school. At that time, I was in class six. My friends were going to school. My grandfather forced my father to forbid us from going to school, as he heard that militants were harassing girls on the way to school. They were thinking if someone bullied their granddaughters, it will be so shameful for them” (Subhana, 18 years).

Another woman told that:

“Militants were repeatedly talking about purdah and punishment for not observing it. There were rumours that they (militants) will kill women seen in public. So, I stop going to school. Also, they announced on FM that female education is un-Islamic. I got scared that if I continued my education, I would never enter Jannah” (Sarah, 19 years).

Likewise, another young woman said that:

“When the ban on education was announced, we all girls stop going to school. I never wanted to quit but there was no other option. And then we migrated to Sawabi (district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) during the war in Swat” (Rabia, 21 years).

The militants started doing more barbaric actions in nearby villages, so I had to stop going to school. In this context she uttered that:

“After class eight, I had to go to another school because there was no high school for girls in our village. Some girls from my village were going to High school at Mingora. I also insisted on my parents and after one year I join the school again. It was just the beginning of my new school that Maullaisaib (Maulana Fazlullah) announced on the radio that girls must not go to school...education for girls is a source of obscenity. As my school was at distance and some (barbaric) incidents had happened repeatedly. There was no other way but to quit school” (Ayesha, 24 years).

Likewise, another woman discussed her reason for being a dropout from school that:

“After the first military operation, we thought things will be normal again. But one of my schoolteachers was killed (by militants). Her death was a tragedy and a lesson for others by the militants, to stop sending girls to school. They were repeatedly announcing that women’s education is vulgarity and not in Islam. Thus, all our community elders decided to not send girls to school for some time” (Sheema, 19 years).

Many of the women were forced to quit conventional education and join madrassah when militants gain control over the area.

“When the militants announced female education is un-Islamic, my elder brother forbids me from going to school and forced me to join madrassah in our village. I was not interested in going to a madrassah, so I just stayed home. And my brother was happier with my decision. Militants give more power to men when they forced women to stay inside (their homes)” (Zubaida, 21 years).

Militants wanted women to stay home and forbid education. The patriarchal structure of Pakhtun society provided an easy ground for them to uphold extremism. None of the women left their education by will, rather they were forced to drop out for securing their lives. However, some women left education only because it was portrayed as something against religion. Militants misused culture and religion to gain power in the region. Attacking female education was the prime concern of militants.

5.2. Gap in the Educational Year

The attacks on schools and schoolgirls, female schoolteachers forced girls to stop going to school. It brings a gap in their education. It has been noted that more of the women had about two years of gap in their education during the conflict and post-conflict period. A respondent added that:

“The nearby school was blasted in 2008 by the militants. It was the only high school in our area. Girls from other villages were also coming to that school. As the army (military) came to swat and there was an operation against the militant, we all migrated to Mardan (district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa). At the beginning of 2010, when peace was revived in the valley, we return to our village. The school was under construction. And I was not allowed to go to school at distance. This causes a gap of almost two years in my education” (Sobia, 23 years).

Destruction of schools was a major reason for the gap in education for many of the women. An extract from interview:

“When the government asked us to leave Swat, my family moved to Peshawar. My elder uncle was living there so we stayed with him. After a few months, I was enrolled in school on Peshawar, I missed my friends and my schoolteachers. I passed my class 7th from Peshawar and return to Swat. I was supposed to be in class 8th but, there were no teachers for higher classes and the school was not fully rebuilt. I and my friends waited for almost a year” (Jalwa, 20 years).

It was a planned strategy for the militants to target girls’ schools. In several areas the schools were used as militant’s headquarters. While reflecting upon this she told that:

“Our school was very big. It was the only high school in the locality, in the beginning, our principal was receiving threatening letters from the militants. But the school was open, and we were

going to school. One day I and my friends were walking to school, a man (probably militant) carrying a gun on his shoulder, come towards us, and asked us to go home immediately. We ran home and I was so scared. I could not sleep for a few nights. After a few months, we went to Charsaddah (district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) as IDPs. And when we return, our school was under construction. According to village folks, the school was used as headquarter by the militants, and later it was set on fire. I missed one and years of my education in all this process” (Fareeda, 20 years).

After the military operation and talibanization in Swat valley people of Swat were under the psychological influence of war and militant’s brutality. During an interview a participant narrated that: *‘People were still scared that militants may return and attack the schools and girls. My mother and grandmother were not secure enough to allow me to join the school. After one year when they were assured, things are getting normal than they allowed me, my cousins, to continue our education.’ (Urooj, 18 years).*

5.3. Motivation for Education

Most of the women in my study have a strong conviction to continue their education. They strongly believed that militants failed in their agenda of attacking female education, *‘what they thought, they will attack our school and deprive us of education’*, said a young woman. Women in this study were aware of their right to education, and its importance. A respondent explained that:

“Education is more important for women. Developed countries they are developed because they have educated women and their women are running governments, flying airplanes, scientists, even an armed force. Here those militants wanted to destroy the development of our country which is why they targeted us. But now we will get higher education and will be part of our country’s development” (Jameela, 21 years).

Despite having a gap of a year or more of their education, these young women were determined to fulfill their dreams. It is courageous that despite all sufferings and forced migration, these women struggle for their return to schools.

“In my entire life leaving Swat was the most painful experience. Many people died in this war, many young boys become part of the militancy and were killed in the war. In our neighborhood, from one house two men were killed during the war. The woman was left behind with two unmarried daughters and one son of five years and they were dependent on others. Only those women who were educated survived with dignity. Some got LHV training and started jobs, while others become teachers in private schools. After all this, I eagerly want to be highly educated and work” (Tauheeed, 24 years).

Militancy along with military operations compelled people of Swat on migration. Migration left a psychological and economic impact on them. But women being acting as victims turned into agents of change, they motivated themselves. An extract from interview:

“I always wanted to become a doctor. During migration from Swat, women faced several problems related to health. Two women were pregnant, and they were in pain, but there was no doctor nearby to treat them. One of them passed away [continued in a heavy voice] ...it was a difficult time. At that moment I was more determined to become a doctor so I could help the people of my community in case of an emergency. I am now in call 10 and I am a science student. One day I will be a doctor” (Yasmeen, 18 years).

Although in Islam both men and women have been encouraged to attain education. But the militants misinterpreted the religion for their vested interests. In similar context a respondent told that:

“Our Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) says that education is equally important for both men and women. I was always passionate about education, but our schools were closed and destroyed. The militants are misusing Islam for their benefit. I have read Quran with translation; I never find anything in the Quran that says forbid girls from education. When our school was reopened, I was so happy. I want to pursue education and severe my nation in political field like the late Benazir Buttho”.

The effects of insurgences were affecting female education in indirect manner such as poverty and losing the breadwinners. In such a situation it had serious impacts on the quality of education, however; some women were determined to continue their education despite all hardships. An extract from interview:

“Our farms were destroyed in this war and we faced a huge economic loss. My father became ill due to depression. After four months of our return to Swat, in 2010 my father passed away. It was Qayamat in our lives. I was thirteen years old at that time and my brothers are younger than me. The only source of income was the rents from shops in Mingora Bazar. I realized we are poor now, so I left the private school and joined the public school near our home. But I never wanted to stop my education” (Zubaida, 21 years).

5.4. Challenges in Joining Back the Schools

The social structure of Swat is mostly patriarchal. People of Swat (Pakhtun) are very conservative about their honour and dignity. Male honour is embodied in women's bodies. It is considered very dishonourable and shameful for the whole family and tribe if their women willingly or unwillingly come across any culturally inappropriate behaviour. In war and displacement, women are the most vulnerable, they are victims of rape and other sexual violence. After facing the war and displacement, many Pakhtun men were insecure regarding the honour of their women:

“My father was not in favour of my joining the school again. He wanted to arrange my marriage and get rid of this responsibility. I know it was because of the fear of militants. In such a situation (war and displacement) the honour of women is very sensitive. Many women are raped or kidnapped during the war; we all know it. I fought a lot for joining back school. A group of some women from NGOs visited our village, they motivated girls for continuing education after that my mother and other family members convinced my father to send us (girls) to school. After too much struggle he was convinced” (Tauheed, 24 years).

Women among Pakhtuns are socialized from a very young age to learn and participate in domestic activities such as cooking, cleaning, washing, and taking care of family members. Household is the private unit of patriarchy (Bourdieu, 2001; Walby, 1990). Even though the culture and traditions also expect Pakhtun women to participate in household activities from a young age. Usually, women accept it and join other women of the household in domestic activities. But for some women this becomes a challenge in their educational journey: A respondent told that:

“When the army announced that they will launch an operation in the area and we all must leave Swat within a few hours. It was an emotional moment. My parents stayed at Swat and send us along with our uncles to our relatives at Swabi. They promised that they will

also come, but only my father came there. My mother passed away; she was hit by Ariel fire [tears in her eyes and continued in a painful tone after a short silence]. I was responsible for domestic chores and taking care of my younger siblings. I couldn't join back the school. I was convinced by my friends and school teacher to continue my education. So, I started education privately. I will appear in board exams now. I have studied a lot" (Rabia, 21 years).

The insecurity among men was higher than women. It is because they are considered as the guardian of women in a patriarchal setup. And that is why they dominate women in every decision of their lives. Militancy was the biggest fear and after the military operations, it was put to an end. But still, the fear among Swat people was alive: A respondent explained:

"I was beaten up by my brother when I told him about joining back school. He was against education especially after the militancy he was so not in favor of women going to school and colleges because he thought whatever Mullah (Fazlullah) said was valid. Also, during the displacement, our women were bay-purdah (unveiled). This made him so much against the women going out of the home. When he went to Dubai, I was allowed to go to school. It is ok I have wasted one year of my education, but I am glad that I have continued" (Sobia, 23 years).

Similarly, another participant said:

"My elder brother has a fear that the militants are coming again one day. And then they will kill every woman who is out of home, either in school or in Bazar. It will be a huge shame and violation of purdah if women are lying dead on the streets" (Zubaida, 21 years).

In this context another participant told that:

"Some men in our village brainwashed my father that he must not allow us (the daughters) to go back to school. Because it is not in Sharia and Pakhtunwali that women leave the home boundaries. These people were creating issues for us every next day. Even they were spreading rumors that militants will attack the school again and will burn the girls alive. I was very upset because my final exams were nearby. So, my father sent me to Mingora to his brother's home. It was very difficult to stay away from my parents, but I did because I wanted to appear in exams" (Sarah, 19 years).

The brutal actions of militants have a psychological impact on the mental health of Swat people. In similar context a participant share his views that:

"For me, maintaining my mental health was the greatest challenge. The husband of our school principal was kidnapped and beheaded by the militants. A few weeks later his dead body was sent to his home in a bag. I was traumatized after this incident... I was living with fear that militants will shoot me on the way to school or will kill my father for sending me to school. So, I was not ready to go back to school. Some doctors were coming to the city hospital for treating those who were psychologically affected. My parents took me to the hospital for more than eight months. It took more than a year to be normal...now I am going to school" (Fareeda, 20 years).

6. Discussion and Conclusion

Female education remained the main target of militants in Swat valley. The findings of this study show that women have been through violence and terror directly and indirectly during the

militancy, displacement, and post-conflict situation. The experiences of women interviewed in this study express their sufferings, challenges, and oppression. In Pakhtun society, there has already existed a gender gap in education for decades. Also, women's education is not the priority of government policies as well (Jamal, 2015). Gender discrimination in education is arising from the patriarchal mindset of Pakhtuns, according to which it is 'inappropriate for Muslim and Pakhtun women to obtain modern education as they could become westernized' (Orakzai, 2011, p. 12). Militants borrowed this ideology from the culture and blend it with religion. According to the militants, female education is a western concept. Denouncing women's education, a sinful act, and an element to pollute women's mind westernizes them and deviate them from Islam and *Pakhtunwali*. This new mindset created by the militants made female education a suspicious element for those who were influenced by the militants' ideology. Gender motive and misogyny were very evident in their agenda. That is also confirmed through the narratives of participants of this study. It was believed by the militants that schools in Pakistan are run under the 'system introduced by the British and promote obscenity and vulgarity in society (O'Malley, 2010, p. 80). In Swat 116 girls' schools were fully and partially destroyed by the militants (Azhar, 2012). Widespread extreme atrocities and attacks on girls' schools and school staff threaten parents and school-going girls. As a result, over 120,000 students and 8,000 female teachers stopped attending school (HRW, 2017). The finding of this study is in line with other research (Khattak, 2018) that people withdraw their girls from schools. It is also observed that the drop out of girls from school initiated simultaneously with the rise of militancy in Swat.

The participation of women in the public sphere is discouraged among Pakhtuns through the norms of purdah, although this purdah is arising from the concept of purdah in religion. But it was never meant for discouraging their participation in education. In Islam, both men and women must attain education. Whereas militants used the patriarchal interpretation of Islam and *Pakhtunwali* to justify the confinement of women to the private sphere i.e., home and perform their traditional roles (domestic activities and reproduction). Imposing a ban on education for women was their tactic to control women's mobility, enforce purdah, and eliminate their appearance in the public sphere. Another explanation for this observed in this study was to maintain masculine domination over women. As the decision to drop out of girls from school was majorly done by a brother, father, or other community men. Women were exploited and dominated by the militants as well as other men of their social circle. In the conflict situation, militants were the main agents of domination who perpetuate power and violence to control women. (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 130) maintains that habitus plays an important role, its strategies in setting up and perpetuating durable relations of domination is an effect of the structure of the field. The social formation of Pakhtun society institutionalizes domination. It further confirms that the disposition (habitus) for Pakhtun women allowed militants to discourage their participation in education by controlling their mobility. It enabled them to reproduce the structure of relations of domination and dependence. This scenario produced a gap of a year and more in the schooling years of the girls, slowing down the process of education in Swat valley. Almost every participant of this study witnessed that direct violence against schoolgirls, coupled with displacement resulted in a gap in educational years. Besides it, the loss of income and livelihood opportunities, the death of family members, and fear of militancy hampered education for women. Ullah, Khan&Mahmood (2017) in their study on IDPs also find that along with other socioeconomic factors, displacement also causes significant gaps in educational attainment.

While in the post-conflict situation the nature of issues changed. Men from the family and community became the agents of domination. This transformation brought new challenges for some women in their struggle for continuing education in a post-conflict situation. One reason behind this authoritative behavior as a challenge is the honour and shame complex among Pakhtuns. The whole mechanism of Pakhtun culture revolves around honour. It will give birth to massive shame if Pakhtun women experience any kind of culturally inappropriate act. The fear of losing honour was not an assumption, rather it has been reported that militants had crossed the line of decency by physically

abusing, threatening, killing, and torturing the women in Swat. As some participants highlighted that their men were so conservative about purdah in a post-conflict situation. Research (Azim, Jan, & Williams, 2018; Khattak, 2018) has also highlighted that the norm of purdah has been dishonored during this whole conflict and displacement episode. According to (Khattak, 2018) the fear of being dishonored regulated the decisions of women for giving up their education.

In this study, all the women I interviewed were determined despite all challenges and continued their struggle for attaining education in a post-conflict situation. Similarly, from the narrations of some of these women, their struggle for education was supported by some men. These were the men who believed that women must attain education and they have the disposition (*habitus*) to earn a quality education. The struggle of these women for joining schools after the militancy, war, and displacement is challenging the *doxa*, which opens up spaces for new knowledge (Bourdieu & Eagleton, 1992). Women struggle for education in post-conflict situations among Pakhtuns has become a new norm. It somehow leads to the transformation of women's position in Pakhtuns society and structural changes through breaking the patriarchal setup in the field of education. Structural changes are linked to consciousness (Moghadam, 2013). Despite conscious efforts to recognize that militancy has been demolished through war against them by the state military, some people assumed that there is a 'return' of militants. And they may again target the girls' schools and people who are sending their women to schools. Hence, such an attitude increase tensions for young women who continued their education in the post-conflict period. In other words, it disrupted the women's agency and confined them to the structure. Bourdieu's concept of *doxa* is very much relevant when understanding these women's struggles and overcoming the challenges. The attack on female education by the militants enabled them to challenge gender boundaries as well as change them. Militants created a field in which female education was un-Islamic and young women were forced to quit staying at home. But in the post-conflict period, there was a discrepancy between the field created by militants and the new *habitus* of these young women, resulting in the questioning of the cultural norm which was taken for granted. That motivated women to continue their educational journey to remain independent and strive for development.

Although the school going women were victimized by the militancy, the findings of this study show that in post-conflict situations these young women were playing a positive role by rejecting their status as a victim. Yet they overcome the challenges and terrorism they have been through. Although armed conflict is not a positive event itself, the situation created through it sometimes help women to strategize their lives. The conflict played as a catalyst for gender emancipation in a post-conflict society, producing an empowering atmosphere for women, even within challenges in their new *habitus*.

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