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<b>Article:</b>	<b>The Testimony of Traumatic and Violent Conflict: Pukhtu Poetry in Swat in Retrospect</b>
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**ABSTRACT**

The post 2001 conflict and violence in Swat, northern Pakistan, has devastated different arenas of the social fabric of the Pukhtuns living in the region. In this context, the impact of conflict and associated violence on Pukhtu poetry and poets of the region is highly significant. During the conflict, the 'space' for the literary people shrunk, which also played an important role in the transformation of local poetry and adopting new subjects with the prominence of themes like violent extremism and terror in the poetry. Moreover, this study uses trauma and testimony theories to identify and understand the traumatic events and the process of testimony in indigenous Pukhtu poetry. The arguments are based on 18 in-depth interviews with poets and intellectuals from Matta Tehsil (administrative unit) of Swat combined with ethnographic observation and published work of poets from the same administrative unit.

**Keywords: Conflict, Violence, Testimony, Trauma Poetry, Swat, Pakistan.**

## INTRODUCTION

Swat (see figure 1 below) an ex-princely state of British India, is now the Pukhtun populated district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan and home to 2,309,570 people, among which 90% speak Pukhtu as their native language (Azim 2018b:33). This region has been significant for multiple reasons, both historically and in contemporary times. In this context Swat has been the focus of recent academic studies, media inquiries and reports of governmental and non-governmental organizations in the post 2001 era because of the violent conflict between militants and the Pakistani state military. Though violent conflict started in 2007 (Fleischner 2011:10), its roots can be traced back to the end of Cold War (Orakzai 2011:40), the *Mujahideen* movement and Taliban regime in Afghanistan and Tehreek-e-Nafaz-e-Shariat-e-Muhammadi (TNSM) of Maulana Sufi Muhammad<sup>1</sup> (Ali and Naveed 2010:100).

As a background, it is pertinent to note that in the post September 2001 era, when the United States (US) launched the so called ‘war on terror’ in Afghanistan and across, Pakistan saw the rise of Muslim militants and subsequent military action in regions bordering Afghanistan like the tribal districts<sup>2</sup> and Malakand division. This rise of militancy was in the form of Tehreek e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) with a faction from Swat called the “Swati Taliban”. These militants challenged the government writ and spread violence in the region, particularly Swat (Rahi 2011:31–37). The government in a bid to control the situation, enacted a controversial peace deal with the militants and passed Nizam i Adal Regulations (Dawn 2008; Majeed 2016:78–92). However, the deal failed in its objectives and did not stop

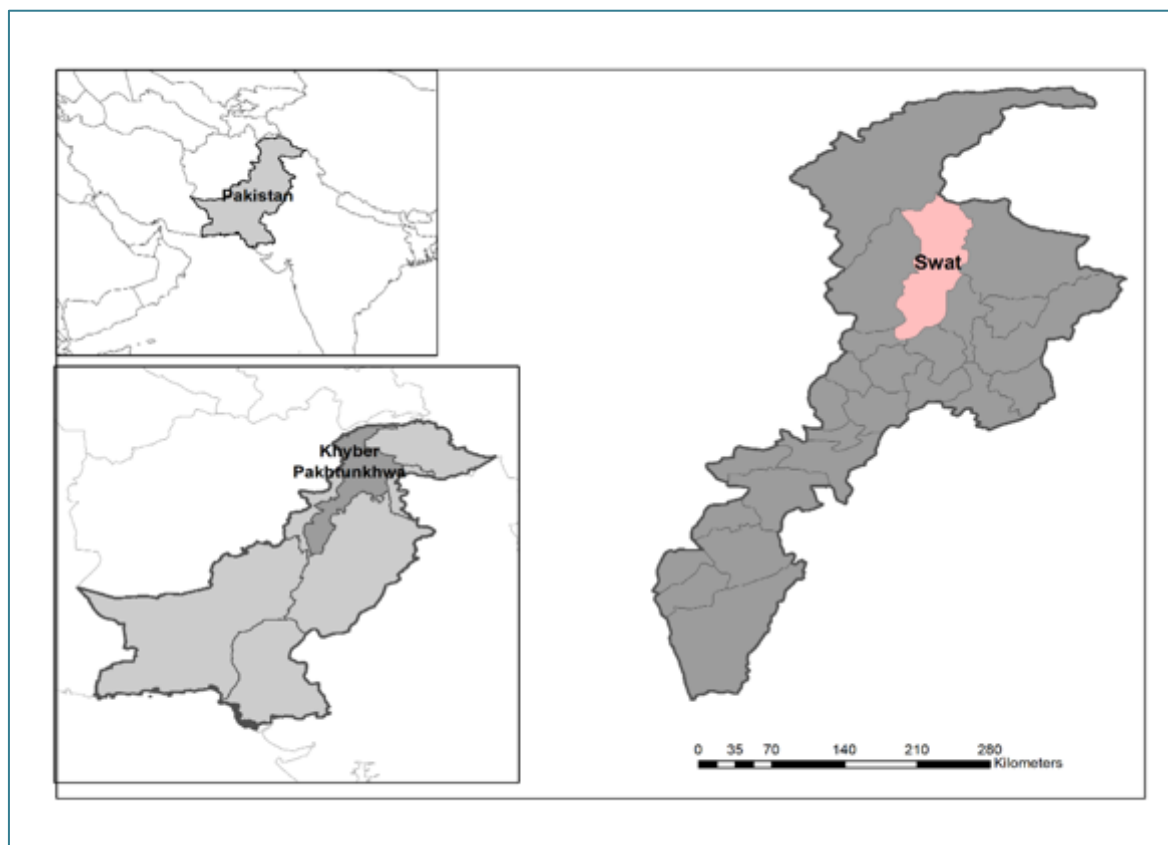
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<sup>1</sup> Movement for the restoration of Mohammadan Shariah was a movement of 1990’s started by Sufi Muhammad, of Dir (neighboring district of Swat) an ex-official of the Islamist political party Jammāt-i-Islami with an aim to enforce his version of Islamic Sharia in Malakand division (for details see Rome 2012:119–44)

<sup>2</sup> Tribal districts were known as FATA – Federally Administrated Tribal Areas – regulated under FCR – Frontier Crimes Regulations – which was a special set of laws from the British India and after independence in 1947 were regulated under the federal government of Pakistan. These tribal areas were merged to the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan after the 25<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendment passed by the parliament and then signed by the president of Pakistan on May 28, 2018 (for details see Wasim 2018).

the violence as it was broken by militants who expanded to Buner, a neighbouring district of Swat, and even expanded their activities to Rawalpindi a twin city with Islamabad (the country's capital) and assassinated the former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto (Dawn 2007). As the state, government and the military was questioned (Schiffrin 2009), the military launched multiple military operations in Swat and Malakand division. The conflict between militant's and the military also resulted in two million internally displaced (IDPs) Swatis who had to move outside Swat. Some of them lived with relatives, some rented houses and the others lived in government established IDP camps (Azim, Jan, and Williams 2018:68–69).

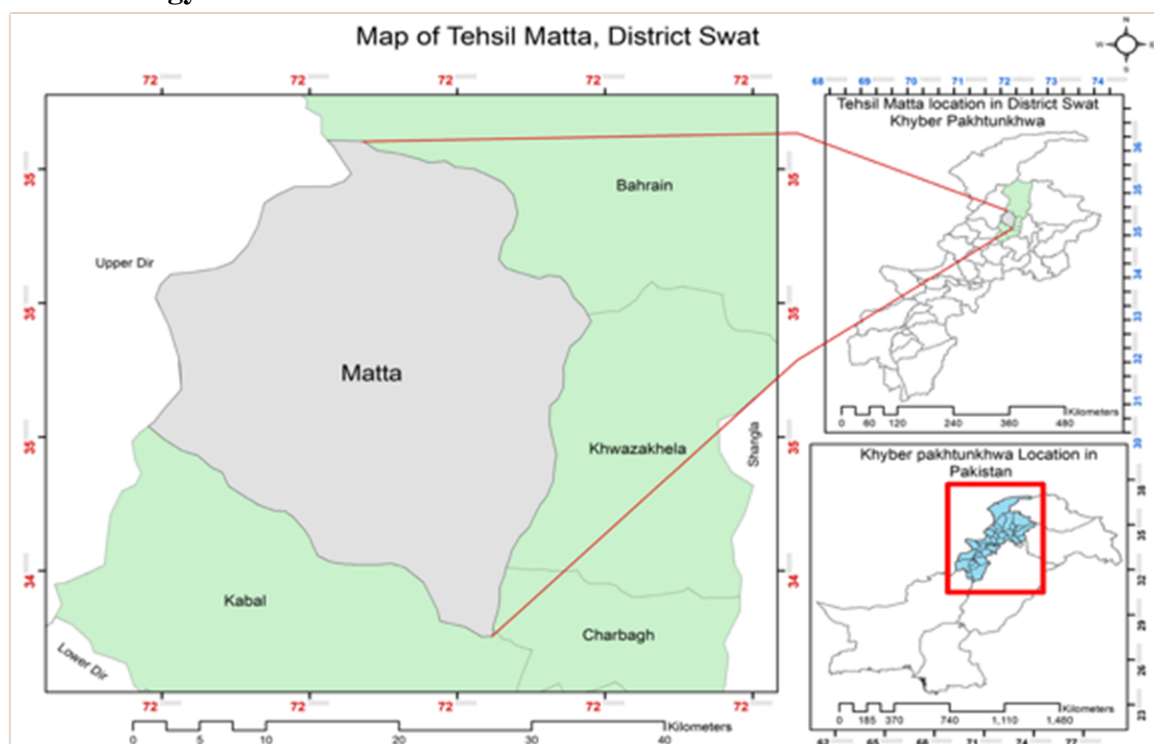
This conflict has impacted the lives of the inhabitants of this region enormously. These impacts are multiple and can be identified in various aspects of the lives of Swatis ranging from socio-political (Azim 2018a:58–74, 2018b:253; Bangash 2012:66–79), to economic (Bhatti 2015:235; Khalid 2020:404–16), and even psychological (Khan et al. 2015). Along this backdrop, among other repercussions of the conflict, the indigenous Poetic art of Swat has been impacted. The significant impact that the conflict exerted upon poetic literature resulted in a reaction which constitutes a metaphoric and direct shift in language while reflecting upon and resulting in testimonies of the traumatic events. This shift and transformation in poetic language is the result of militancy and a harsh conflictive environment in this region amidst the violence. Themes like extremism, terror, and fear, linked with the trauma of the conflict and violence have found testimonies in the poetry produced in conflict and post conflict time periods in Swat. This can be situated against the earlier reflections of poetry mostly dominated with explorations of the natural beauty of Swat or the history of this region along with war and violence but in a different context. region. This present study engages in some of the themes, grounding them in empirical data collected in Swat from poets, intellectuals and their published poetries. Before the discussion of these themes, below is the discussion of collection of data and the theoretical premise of this study.



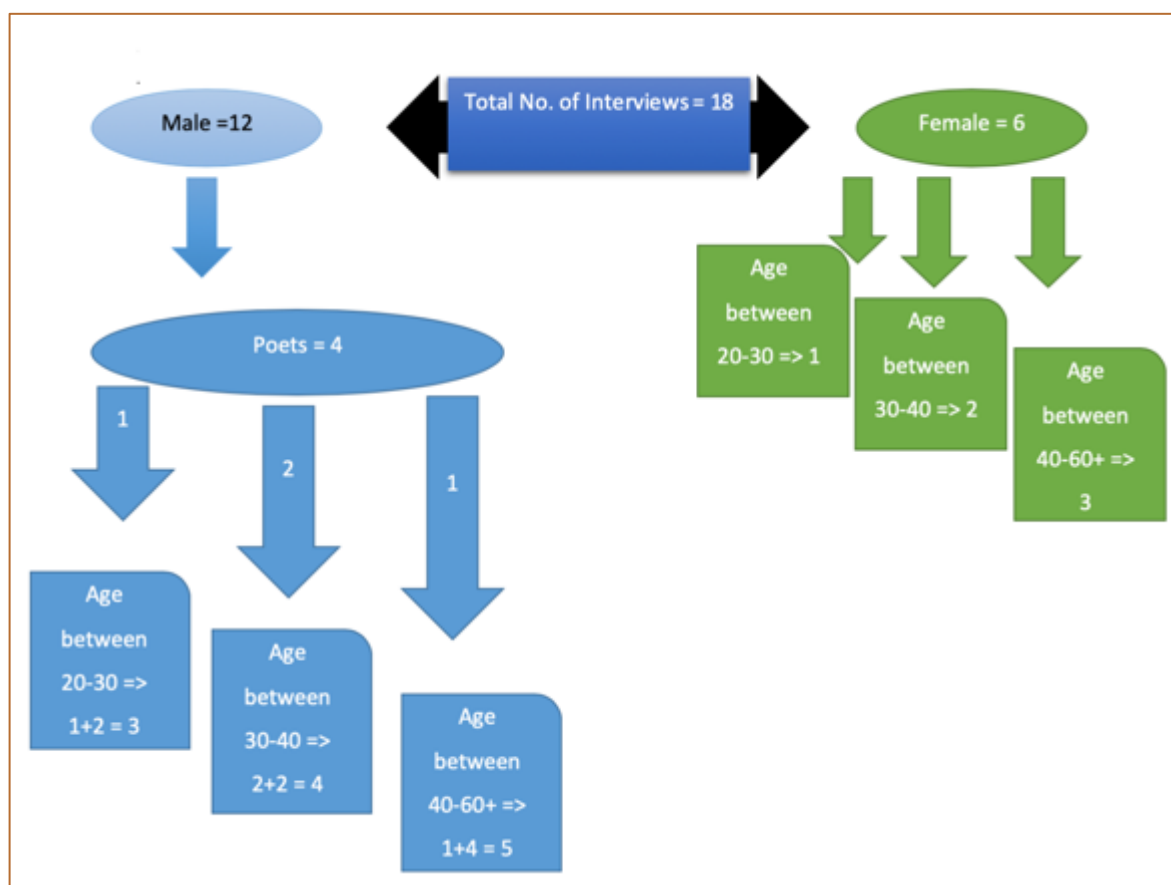
**Figure 1**, Source (Azim 2018b:32)

## Figure 2

### Methodology and data collection



The study is qualitative in nature utilizing the in-depth experiences of the participants. The data was collected between March and November 2017 through 18 ‘interviews termed discussions’ which is triangulated with personal observation (with one author being a resident of the region and another having a PHD through fieldwork in Swat) and texts of poetry from specific poets of the region. Data was collected in the Tehsil Matta (see figure 2 below) of Upper Swat. Tehsil Matta is significant because of its geographical location being situated in upper Swat and central to the extremist violence of Taliban and Military. The tehsil witnessed high level of violence and intense military operations and presence. Participants of the study



include the poets, whose books were used as secondary data, local elders, students, and people of various professions. The flow chart below shows the number of interviews and their demographic division.

The participants of the study were carefully selected and based on a certain criterion. Two points were considered in the selection process of poets as participants. First, the

selected poets lived in Swat for at least six months during the conflict in Swat. These criteria ensured the participation of poets who have experienced and witnessed the events of conflict in Swat and could have a self-reflection. Second, the selected poets have at least one published poetry book. This was done with an aim of ensuring secondary textual data to be considered in this study. As a result, this study did not include any female poets because no female poet was found to fulfil the second criteria of having at least one published book. Likewise, the participants are of different ages, some as young as 25 years and other as old as 60 years in order to ensure diversity in the generation and perspectives of the poets. Thus, purposive sampling was used in selection of the participants (Azim 2018b:36; Seidman 2006:51).

Furthermore, interviews are mostly semi-structured with discussions on conflict, violence, and militancy in Swat. Time for these discussions varied, with some lasting for half an hour while others for multiple hours. The interview schedules were designed in such a way to give space to the participants to share their experiences and stories, while aiming to collect data and events which reflect the conflict of Swat. The interactions were mostly in the guest rooms of participants homes and were informal, whereas part of Melmastya<sup>3</sup> the researcher was greeted as a guest and served with tea, launch and sometimes dinner (researchers have been reporting this aspect, for example see Azim, Jan, et al. 2018:70). The language used was Pukhtu, the native language of people in the region. Moreover, all the interviews were conducted physically with the respondents, except one which was conducted virtually through Facebook video call. In every case, field notes were taken because audio or video recording were not suitable for many reasons, particularly the sensitivity of the topic. To reach out to the participants of the study researchers utilized personal, family, and friends'

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<sup>3</sup> Melmastya or hospitality is the element of Pukhtunwali. Pukhtun will offer hospitality to stranger, guest or even an enemy. (for details see Ali 2013)

connections which were useful in identifying potential participants (Azim 2018b:35; Hammersley and Atkinson 2007:46–49).

Moreover, pseudonyms are used throughout the study to ensure the confidentiality of the participants. The naming system is an extension of the one used by Azim (Azim 2018b:42). In this context, names ending with “Khan” and “Begam” are elders of age above 50 and are male and female participants respectively, while names ending with “Shah” and “BiBi” are young males and females respectively below the age of 40. However, the names of the poets are real as we considered their publish work (for additional details see Azim, Jan and Williams, 2018, p. 7).

Additionally, a note on translation is significant to the methodology. As the published work is in Pukhtu language, it is translated and explained in English by one of the researchers while maintaining the meaning of verses. The data collected is used to analyse and understand the impact of the conflict on Pukhtu Poetry within the theoretical frame of trauma and testimony theories.

### **Trauma and testimony**

The definition of the concept of trauma is disputed in the academic community. Balaev has noted that trauma “might best be understood in terms of the changing psychological definitions of trauma as well as the semiotic, rhetorical, and social concerns that are part of the study of trauma in literature and society” (Balaev 2014:2). On the other hand Sigmund Freud has linked the term with the witness of the war and explained Trauma in his work, ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’, as the wound of the mind rather on the body (Viñuelas 2018:3). War disrupts every aspect of life and changes the basic assumption of life and its perspectives while the survivors then experience an unfamiliar and threatening world (Corcoran 1994:132), which shatters and threaten their life experiences (LaCapra 2004:117). Therefore, it is very challenging for the victim to express themselves; as a result, it leads to



the expression, sometimes in poetry, of the disturbed image in their mind reflecting traumatic events and helplessness which can only be understood in retrospect. While on other hand, some trauma critics identified victims' difficulties "to put their experiences into words"(Viñuelas 2018:4); however, we contented that poets have an enormous ability to put, almost, their experiences into words. It is also argued that the poets and other conflict victims might not be fully aware of their trauma but still want to share their stories (Viñuelas 2018:4). Likewise, the concept of testimony is helpful in recognising the conflict-ridden work of poets. Though it is very difficult for the victims of the trauma to express themselves, however, some scholars emphasise on the necessity of expression as some victims who remain silent becomes victims of their own distorted memory (Felman and Laub 1991:79). It has also been noted that the victim struggles in finding an appropriate language to express themselves or the horrified events. Nevertheless, the poets finds themselves in the position of having a relationship to the language and the traumatic events and offer testimony, which acts as therapy for the victims while literature become the witness of those events (Felman and Laub 1991:xviii; Viñuelas 2018:5). Thus, the present study utilizes trauma-testimony conceptualisation to understand indigenous poetry in Swat as expression and testimonios of the trauma they have witnessed and felt during the violent conflict of Swat. Moreover, this research contends that poets are in a move levered position to express and document the trauma they have witnessed and for this reason focuses indigenous Pukhtu poetry.

### **The impact of fear, violence and conflict on the people and indigenous Pukhtu poetry of Swat**

Poetry is a language for expressing powerful messages, hidden semantic themes, complaints, aesthetic senses, and imaginations (Khalil 2014:126). Since the birth of civilisation, it has been used to present the inner tongue of heart. A poet is considered as the ده قام سترگي (eyes of the nation), as he/she can feel and see problems in his/her nation or

society. A poet is also considered as one of the most sensitive people in society and is said to even forecast events before they happen, presenting it in his/her poetic art which is handled with proficiency and care. Language and manner of poetry differ from that of conventional ordinary language. Its language has variant aspects which draw a border between common prose and poetry. The situation in the context of Swat Pukhtuns and poetry is no different. Dr Hakim Khan, a Pukhtu professor from Swat commented as:

“The environment affects the sub-unconscious of the people and as poets in general are more sensitive individuals they are affected the most in the society. As poets are one of the sensitive people, so they write what they feel and see in the form of poetry and creative work” (Hakim Khan 2017).

Furthermore, professor Hanif Khalil argued that young poets were more affected compared to others which can be seen in their poetry and reflects more painful crises of the region. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, most of the poets have explored the subject to its core not only in poems but also in their *Ghazals*<sup>4</sup>, with the same intensity of emotions and sentiments. This is the reason behind the fact that *Ghazals* genre, assumed as romantic traditionally, also has the depictions and portrayal of conflict and violence (Khalil 2014:126–27). A young poet, in his 20s, Gul Dawood Lalkowal expresses similar views on the subject and commented as:

“I was in Saudi Arabia and my whole family in Swat, including my little daughter, whom I love the most. They were faced with militancy and violence while I was unable to reach to them, to protect them, even, I was unable to talk to them. There was a time when I did not know that whether my family is alive or not, I could not talk for three months of curfew, in which all means of communications were

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<sup>4</sup> *Ghazal* is one of the famous genres of Pukhtu poetry. It is made of odd number of verses and contains of different thought or theme and mostly famous for romantic themes in Pukhtu poetry. However, it is also very common in Urdu, Punjabi, and other local languages. (for details see Gelder 2009:180–84).

blocked. I spent most of time seating in front of television to know the situation of Swat, which affected me, and I jotted down my feelings in my poetry” (Lalkowal 2017).

However, based on the field discussions, it is evident that the conflict has not only impacted young poets, it has ramifications for others as well. Abdur Rahim Roghani, in his 70s, commented as:

“The sensitive people express what they see and feel about it. My previous book “د رڼا څاڅکي” (Drops of light) published in 2014 mostly reflect the crisis and extreme conflict of Swat. Not only I but almost every poet wrote what they saw, hear and felt about it” (Roghani 2017).

The discourse of militants was mostly based on an extreme interpretation of Islam. Likewise, their actions were very violent. This has been reflected by poets in their work. Hakim Ullah Baryaly, a poet in his late 30s from Matta, indicated as:

“Being a part of the law enforcement agencies, I saw what others cannot. They [militants] slaughtered our fellow police officers and did what humans cannot even think of. It is very traumatic to recall those events but what I wrote in poetry mostly reflect them directly or indirectly” (Baryaly 2017a).

It is pertinent to note that killing was almost common for militants and for many in Swat, particularly the government servants and officials it was a matter of how to survive. One of the respondents Sajid Shah, a participant in his 30s, describes the traumatic time of conflict days as:

“Those were tough days. Every morning we used to pray that members of our family, neighbour, and village are safe from being killed. Every night was like a nightmare and I used to keep my family in the basement of our house to keep

them safe as we used to hear the sounds of bullets and fires of heavy artillery”  
(Sajid Shah 2017).

The extreme situation in Swat further expanded to terror and fear in the people which is considered one of the main aims of the militants’ organisation. People were afraid of being killed, humiliated, and dishonoured and of losing their loved ones and properties. An elder Badshah Khan, commented on the probable loss of respect and honour as:

“I always solved the problems of others by Jirga<sup>5</sup>, but those years were ridiculous for us, and we were afraid for our respect and honour because they [Taliban] only understand the language of violence and gun. So, we remained silent in public and tried to protect our Purdah<sup>6</sup>, respect and honour, which we cherished for so many generations” (Badshah Khan 2017).

Lastly, in this context, it is argued that Indigenous Poets from Swat have explored the traumas of conflict and violence as testimonies in their poetry through various themes. Below is an analysis of these themes through the texts of published poetry and the data collected through interviews.

### **Themes in indigenous Pukhtu Poetry of Swat**

Linking poetry and conflict, we argue that the following themes of violent extremism, terror, and fear, have emerged persuasively in the indigenous Pukhtu poetry of Swat. The conflict and violence have impacted poetry which serves as testimonies to the traumatic events of conflict in Swat. Below is the discussion of these themes following the sequence of most significant and most prevalent first.

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<sup>5</sup> Jarga is one of the elements of Pukhtunwali, which is the code of conduct of the Pukhtun tribe dating back centuries. it was also affected by the conflict of Swat (for details see Azim, Mehmood, and Hussain 2018:37–48).

<sup>6</sup> Purdah is an important component of the Pukhtunwali [a Pukhtun code of conduct] (for details see Azim, Jan, and Williams 2018:64–85).

The concept of extremism has been debated in the literature and is subject to much controversy. Researchers, politicians and even extremist groups define it in different ways (Sotlar 2004:1). However, Botticher defined it in a very comprehensive way as:

“Extremism characterises an ideological position embraced by those anti-establishment movements, which understand politics as a struggle for supremacy rather than as peaceful competition between parties with different interests seeking popular support for advancing the common good...where extremists gain state power, they tend to destroy social diversity... and glorify violence as a conflict resolution mechanism and are opposed to the constitutional state, majority-based democracy, the rule of law and human rights for all” (Bötticher 2017:74).

The above definition and fieldwork clearly indicate that the aim of the militants of Swat was same as of the other extremist groups across the globe to gain power and expand it by terrifying common people. Violence has also been central to the extremist movement of the Taliban in Swat and counter-operation of the Pakistani state and the military. That is the reason indigenous literature (both prose and poetry) has expressions of violent extremism. A poet in his 40s from Matta Swat expresses in the following in his book:

سوات ته راشی اے ده وینو حاجت مندو

زمور وینه دلتہ ڊیره ده ارزانہ (Baryaly 2017b:50)

### Translation

O needful of blood! Visit Swat

Our blood here is very cheap

The impact on the poetry can be seen in the verse addressed to others stating that if they need blood, they should come to Swat as it is very cheap here. Moreover, this can also be seen in the context of us and them: the blood of Swatis is cheaper than the others. Similarly,

blood symbolizes the violent nature of Swat conflict. Additionally, it is pertinent to note that the symbols (blood in this verse) are powerful expressions of the real events and happenings. Death and destruction, as stated above was becoming a new normal for Swat and its people. Maria BiBi, a student from the University of Swat in her 20s, recalls an event when she wanted her father to take her for Eid shopping on the last day of Ramadan, the month before Muslim festival of Eid, as:

“When we travelled for approximately one kilometre, I saw three dead bodies on the right side of the road and a number of people were surrounding them. My father rushed the car fast so that I may not be able to see the dead bodies, however, I saw them. They were killed by the militants. This was my first time to see such a bloodshed in the streets of Swat” (Maria 2017).

Such events can be correlated with what Biryali’s statement above that the blood of Swatis is cheaper than others. Another famous poet Abdur Rahim Roghani captured a traumatic violent event, which was indeed the worst form of extremism through slaughtering a human being.

ته ڊپر سخت وي چي مات نه شوي، نه په زمکه راگذار شوي

انسانان چي د خاروو شان په چرو حالېدل

روغانيه! دا بي شرمه تماشه مي نه هېريري

چي ذابح او ذبيح دواړو به الله الله كول (Roghani 2014:392)

### Translation

You [sky] were too hard to break or fall,

When humans were slaughtered like animals,

Roghani! I cannot forget that wild scene,

When slaughterer and victim both praised the God.

As the powerful actors, both the militants and the Pakistani state, were involved in violence, but the poet is symbolically addressing God. In fact, both the actors of the conflict based their violent actions in the discourse of religion, Quran, and Islam. Furthermore, Swatis who were killed are compared to the slaughtering of animals by poets which is a persuasive symbol. Again, to emphasize, the verse is testimony of a real event which has traumatized the poet, Roghani:

“A police officer from BamaKhela [a village near Matta city] was slaughtered by the militants. The officer was Muslim and was calling the name of God, while slaughtering him the militants were doing the same. When I heard about this event I could not sleep for days and nights, it was the worst ever brutal act I had ever heard of, but shame is that it happened in Swat, the people who were famous for peace, love and hospitality” (Roghani 2017).

The discourse in Swat in the context of conflict and violence has an element of nostalgia for Swat before the violence. Moreover, nostalgia has been central to poetries across the languages and cultures (Rozveh and Faramarzi 2017:531–38; for details see Turner 2008:182–206). This nostalgia can be for a real or imagined history or past state. In the context of Swat, nostalgia has been reported for a pre-conflict Swat particularly one which was ruled by the Wali of Swat (for details see Azim 2018b:46, 56, 72, 160, 215). Roghani as a poet remembers the pre-conflict Swat for peace, love, and hospitality. These three characters can be seen in the context of Swat. There is a perception in Swat that the region was peaceful under the rulership of Wali -i- Swat and even later. Though this might contrast with historical evidence, such as the violent movement of Syed Ahmad Barelvi in 1818 (Nasir 2017:354) and TNSM in 1990s (Ali and Naveed 2010:93). Likewise, love and hospitality is also nostalgic for Swatis because it was practised in the context of a constant

flow of outsiders, tourists<sup>7</sup>, and researchers to Swat and the welcoming nature of people of this region<sup>8</sup> (Azim 2018b:109). Nostalgia of an imagined or real time of peace, love and tranquillity is contrasted with the traumatic times of violence and conflict in Swat through the poetic works by poets like Abdur Rahim Roghani.

Such themes are common in poetic expressions of Swat. Muhammad SherJan Senakhel in his book *د لاري نڅينې* [Street Signs] also highlights the same theme of extremism and nostalgia. In one of his poems under the title of *د سوات باره كي* [About Swat] the poet first reminds his readers the ‘glorious’ times of Swat and shows his love for the beautiful valley. He praises the beauty of Swat but in parallel, he also discusses the extreme violent environment in Swat in the times of conflict (Senakhel 2015:60)

ستا ساره ساره بادونه

ستا دا يخ يخ ايشارونه

د بارودو په لوگو کښي

زه دې گورمه لتوم دې

دا په څه زخمي زخمي شوي

(Senakhel 2015:60) په بارودو ټول سټي شوي

### Translation

Your freezing wind and cold waterfalls

Are covered by smoke of explosive powder

I am looking for you, and searching you

What has hurt you so badly!

You are exhausted and burnt by explosive powder

<sup>7</sup> In 2018, according to the provincial tourism department, one million people visited Swat including foreign visitors and this number is expected to raise in the upcoming years. For details see <https://nation.com.pk/05-May-2019/pakistan-s-swat-valley-from-terrorism-to-tourism>.

<sup>8</sup> Based on the personal observations of authors one being a native researcher of Swat and one with a research based in Swat, it is argued that the people of Swat are mostly warm and welcoming to the guests and are termed as “*melama dost*”, guest friendly.



This poem describes the situation of the valley when mountains, covered with natural forests, were burned because of the gunpowder and heavy artillery. Swat is a lush green valley and that is famous among writers and poets. However, the violent situation has brought the previous situation of Swat into spotlight. The nostalgia is for a green and peaceful Swat and is contrasted to the traumatic times of conflict and violence. The situation was described by Maroan Begam:

“Swat was beautiful, before militancy we used to go to nearby fields for collecting some food. But during the conflict when we would wake at morning, we used to see smoke from the mountains and hills. All these [pointing finger to mountains] forests were burnt and there was a fear in everyone's subconscious either to be killed or their houses to be burnt as Taliban bombed the houses and armed forces later did the same with the houses of those who were either suspicious or involved with Taliban” (Maroan Begum 2017).

The argument that the conflict has brought the theme of violent extremism to poetry and that poetry has been expresses the trauma of the victims of Swat has been succinctly explored above. The views and events shared by the participants in the study justify the argument that conflict has entrenched this theme into poetry. Below is the contention that terror and fear among the people of Swat and poets of the region is another theme reflected in the indigenous poetry.

### **Poetic Expressions of Terror and fear**

This section argues that terror and fear is another central theme which occupies a significant portion of the indigenous poetry in Swat. The poetic expressions serve as a testimony of the traumatic times of conflict and violence. The means behind violent extremism were terror and fear, which were spread among the local population in Swat. With terror and fear spread in the region people were forced to follow the orders of militants and

the military without resisting, no matter if the orders were violating their basic rights (Azim 2018b:104). Everyone was afraid for themselves and their beloved ones to be harmed, killed or being insult (Azim 2018b:115). The valley was in chaotic situation, with no order or system to help people those in need or to resist to the cruel rule of the militants. People were afraid and could not speak about the armed forces or the militants [Taliban] (Schiffrin 2009). Writers were afraid of the situation and they feared the brutal consequences for being outspoken in their work. This scenario of silence, fear for their beloved ones, and even fear of being going out of home has captured the imagination of the indigenous poets.

In the poetry of Abdur Rahim Roghani, certain elements can be highlighted which show the fear and terror during the crisis. In his book *سندريز احساس*, [Singing Like Feeling] he has described the terror and fear:

د پښتونخوا په اوربل اور بليري

د خپل د لاسه په خپل اور بليري

چاچي فرياد اوکړو نو پوهه دي شي

په کور د دوي به اول اور بليري (Roghani 2016:167)

### Translation

Fire is burning on Pakhtunkhwa's axis

Friend (relative) is burning because of friend (relative)

And if someone complained about it

His home will burn first

The poet very sophisticatedly used fire and orbit as a metaphor for اور (Fire) and اوربل (Orbit) to describe the crises in the beautiful valley of Swat. He says that the orbit (اوربل) of the Pakhtunkhwa is burning and the fire is lit by its own people. He also says that it is very unfortunate that no one can resist this conflict and even speak against both violent forces and warns people about the habit of being outspoken in this conservative tensed environment.

Furthermore, if anyone goes against the norms and say what is true and right, it can result badly. He also describes the compulsion and prohibition of the freedom of speech. While talking about the freedom of speech Shafiq Shah, a student participant, commented in Pukhtu as “خپله خوله هم قلاده هم بلا” and elaborated as:

“My mother always used this common proverb in Pukhtu ‘خپله خوله هم قلاده هم بلا’ [your own words can be flowery or nasty for you] and emphasised on remaining silent while in the public and not to talk about this [conflict] issue. We do not know who is working for whom, they can harm us and even we cannot ask for justice from anyone” (Shafiq Shah 2017).

Likewise, Gul Dawood Lalkowal, also explored the same theme and was aware of the prohibition on freedom of speech amidst the traumatic terror and fear in Swat. His poetic expression is:

وس رانه ژبه غوڅوي زه غږ کولې نه شم

کولې نه شم حق وېنا چاپېره اور بليري (Lalkowal 2014:45)

### Translation

I cannot say anything, they will cut my tongue

I cannot speak the truth as fire is already burning around,

People of the valley were so oppressed that they were unable to speak the truth and express their views amidst the fear that was prevalent in Swat. Those who tried to gather people or speak against both the parties were killed. Still poets symbolically expressed the pain and wrote the testimonies of the trauma in Swat through written word rather than speech.

Faisal Shah, a schoolteacher from Swat in his 30s, commented on this:

“Those who have some potential to rally people with them, were killed and then it was a common saying that (ده مېني سري پاتي نه شو) there is no one left who can lead.

People were afraid and those who were elected leaders in past election left the

valley except very few like Muhammad Afzal Khan Lala<sup>9</sup> whose sons were killed but he resisted and did not spend even a day outside Swat. Apart from that everyone was hypocrite and double standard to survive” (Faisal Shah 2017).

The fear and terror that was spread in Swat by was so overwhelming that public figures, politicians, local elders and even journalists could not speak up or even stay in the valley. Furthermore, Muhammad Sherjan Senakhel, also described the same theme of fear and terror in his poetry:

پٽ مخونه ظالمان چي پکڻي گرڻي

زه د ظلم د دي لري نه یريرم (Senakhel 2015:255)

### Translation

I fear the fogged way where face-covered cruel wonder,

The reference here is to the militants who have been using a specific type of costume in which they used to cover their faces to avoid any recognition. The poet is alluding to those costumes which served as a symbol of fear and terror for the people. The trauma of conflict and the fear spread in Swat was symbolized to which the poetry cited here is a testimony. Muhammad Sherjan Senakhel commented on this verse as:

“Taliban had been using those black and white stirpe scarfs for covering their faces, and it was hard to recognise them. They used to travel in groups with guns and rocket launchers which was literary a symbol of death. We [Swatis] have not seen such weapons and heavy guns before. The militants were brutal and would not think for a second even in killing someone. They were insane” (Senakhel 2017).

This fear prevailed everywhere both inside and outside the home. Those who were at home mostly worried about those who were outside the home. Mother’s love has no

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<sup>9</sup> A Pukhtun nationalist, and former provincial and federal minister, who is a controversial figure as some local people criticise him for being pro-military and Pakistani state establishment. For details see <https://www.dawn.com/news/1216963>.

alternative, Hakim Ullah Baryaly reflected the concern and fear of mothers in his book “جنگ

”[The War is Brought to the Watering-Place] as:

خدایہ زما بچے د سکول نہ سلامت راولہ

خدایہ سر تورہ راوتلی پسی ور تہ یمہ (Baryaly 2017b:19)

### Translation

O, God! Let my children come home safe from school

God! I am at the door bareheaded

This verse draws sketches of the scenario in which a mother is worried about her son, as he has not arrived home yet from school. She prays to God to bring her child home safe. The Pukhtun women mostly remain in homes while cover head and face when out in public. The symbol of being bare head is thus persuasive and reflects the exigence of the situation. A university student Inamullah Shah shares his story when he was at school at that time and there was curfew just before the school closing time. He commented that:

“I was an eight-grade student at that time. Once the militants attacked a check point of the military, the military soon imposed a curfew while we were in the school. Our school administration kept us on the school premises while hearing the gunshots like an active war. My home is five kilometres away from that school and we were supposed to cross two check points on each side to reach school and come back home. Later our school administration talked to the army officers and we were allowed to leave, but without any vehicle. I reached home in the evening and remember that my father was desperately waiting for me. I also remember that when I entered home my mother was crying and ran towards me to hug me” (Inamullah Shah 2017).

Such poetic expressions are testimonies to the trauma created by conflict and violence in Swat.

## Conclusion

The study illustrates that the conflict has impacted the lives of people of Swat, including poets and their poetry, which has been reflected in the indigenous Pukhtu poetry of Swat. The themes of violence and conflict have been the most prominent in the poetry of indigenous poets. Poets from Swat used many methods and poetic devices to convey the trauma of conflict and violence. The article asserted that poetry is a powerful tool of testimony to the trauma of this conflict and violence in Swat. Moreover, it also illustrates that poetry adopts the voice of common humanity and expresses it in the poems. The prominent expressions and themes in indigenous Pukhtu poetry of Swat in this context are violent extremism, fear, and terror. The poets use symbols and metaphors to represent numerous characters involved in militancy in one way or other.

In this context, the most debated and prominent theme is that of violent Extremism which was followed by the discussions of fear and terror. Poetry acted as a testimony and helped to document the trauma of the people of Swat.

Conclusively, the finding of this study, based on the textual analysis of the indigenous poetry and data collected through interviews and discussions in Swat situates poetry in the theoretical conceptualization of trauma and testimony, reflects that the conflict and violence in Swat has significantly impacted indigenous Pukhtu poetry.

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