

Conflict and Ethnic Identity: Pukhtunwali and Purdahin Conflict Ridden Swat, Pakistan

Syed Wasif Azim¹
Muhammad Ayub Jan²
Nathalie Williams³

Abstract

This study argues that the recent conflict and violence in Swat, a Pukhtun populated region of Pakistan, has diverse and multiple impacts on *Purdah*, a socio-cultural code of Pukhtun culture (*Pukhtunwali*), which is in turn a significant performing aspect and marker of Pukhtun ethnic identity. We postulate that *Purdah* is at least in four forms, named in this study, as women *Purdah* (based on dress code), home *Purdah*, elder men *Purdah* and locality *Purdah*¹. Moreover, the impacts are witnessed in all these four forms of *Purdah*. Likewise, the impacts are considered unfortunate and culturally detrimental by the research participants in Swat. The study is based on 45 open-ended in-depth interviews and five focus group discussions in diverse parts of Swat, coupled with ethnographic observation.

Keywords: conflict, ethnic identity, Pukhtunwali, purdah, swat

Introduction

Purdah as a socio-cultural and ethnic ideal: Forms, shapes and diversity among the Pukhtuns

Though most of the previous literature, media reports and discussions of non-governmental organizations overlook the complexity and multiplicity of forms of *Purdah*, we argue and show in this section that *Purdah* is at least in four forms, named in this thesis, as women *Purdah* (based on dress code), home *Purdah*, elder men *Purdah* and locality *Purdah*². *Purdah* (seclusion/veil) is a traditional and cultural ideal of Pukhtun Society, Pukhtunwali and Pukhtunness (Fredrik Barth, 1969b, pp. 120-122; Jan, 2010, p. 31). *Purdah* ensures the virility, primacy, autonomy, self-expression and aggressiveness of men (Barth, 1969, pp. 120-122; Ahmed, 1977) and gives, to some extent, anonymity, comfort, modesty, status and protection to women (Daraz, n.d.). It is linked to the 'negative' social biases, cultural practices and the concept of

¹ PhD Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, University of Peshawar, Peshawar, KPk.
wasifazim@uop.edu.pk

² Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Peshawar, Peshawar, KPk.

³ Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Washington.

honour and women's sexuality (Fredrik Barth, 1969b, pp. 120–122). The violation of Purdah may lead at times to the phenomenon of revenge/reciprocity (*Badal*) among Pukhtuns. This revenge is towards anyone who has violated the Purdah of Pukhtuns' women and home, be a Pukhtun or non Pukhtun.

There have been different forms of Purdah among the Pukhtuns in Swat in pre-conflict times, including women Purdah, home Purdah, elder men Purdah and locality Purdah. Regarding women Purdah, traditionally, just before the conflict, most of the women used to wear a long sheet (called *sadar or chadar* locally) with some women wearing a 'fashionable burqa' ³. The different forms or colours would show differences based on age or status etc. Muhammad Ishtiaq, a professor from Swat, commented about this as such:

"It was mostly white in colour, a symbol of 'better financial position' and 'good moral behaviour'. Anyone not wearing this, was usually termed as morally or financially 'weak'. It also showed the age level of women based on how they are wearing it. Mostly aged women would have open face or wear a small one or different colour and few would use the Afghan Shuttlecock Burqa. Young girls mix *sadar* with fashionable burqa (different from *shuttle cock*)" (Ishtiaq, 2016).

This elaborative comment of my participant informs that women mostly wear white *sadar* which was, along with Purdah, a symbol of good status and good moral character as women were differentiated by people based on this at times. Moreover, this would also identify the age difference and difference in Purdah based on ages. Thus, the Purdah of aged women will be different from younger ones. This negates the militant's version of Purdah which will be same for all ages of women.

Likewise, related to home Purdah, as women reside inside the home, men, other than close relatives and acceptable to the men of the home, are not allowed to enter. If there is need of any other man (like a doctor etc) to enter the home, there is a 'proper' socially acceptable way and procedure for that. The procedure is socially known, in which women of the home moves to a side and let the man/men enter, accompanied by men of this home, as I frequently observe as a native of the region. An elder in Mingora, Hayat Khan Dada, explained and symbolically expressed this point.

"In Swat and among other Pukhtuns too, there is an important Purdah called Home Purdah (*da kor Purdah*). Nobody can even think of entering our home

without permission of men from the home. Before the conflict we were not feeling it much, as nobody could dare to challenge this. I have rarely heard about such happening. When it was violated during the conflict, we felt it. I can simply tell you that our home ceilings have Purdah even (In Pukhtu it was زمنگ (خو ده برگو هم پرده وی), and they are not seen by men so easily” (Dada, 2017).

The diversity of aspects of Purdah is expanded by a reference to ‘elders Purdah’. This may not be Purdah in a ‘traditional’ sense, as per the principles of most of the Pukhtuns or the code of Pukhtunwali. But because I could observe in discussions in the field, reference to the impacts of conflict situations and even post-conflict ones for this aspect, it is significant, because among the Pukhtuns, elder men normally wear a sheet/*sadar* which has different sizes and colours. Mostly this can be a thin one with brownish or white colour and is used as a symbol of being elder, having honour and Pukhtu. This is considered, along with a traditional cap, a symbol of status, honour and Purdah of Pukhtun men. A Pukhtun elder in Kabal Swat, Shams Dada, mentioned about this aspect.

“As *burqa* is Purdah for women, *sadar* is for men. Both shows honour and Pukhtu. It was common in Swat that a *mashar*/elder will wear this. Because of this conflict we are required in some places, like the Judicial complex, to leave these outside the building while entering and that is why elders as well as Youngers are feeling this as a violation of honour”(Shams Dada, 2017).

Yet another form of Purdah that has also grown in importance due to the conflict in Swat is locality Purdah (*da ilaqae Purdah*). As a tribe, sub tribe or a larger family used to be in a specific area or locality that would facilitate the broader Purdah of that area. This would help in maintaining the limited movement of women in the area and maintaining a social or moral order in the area. Villages close to the urban centres, like Mingora, have seen intense impacts for this aspect. About the prevalence or significance of this Purdah, a political activist, Misbah Ullah shared with me, in Nawae Kalae Mingora, that:

“There are a lot of shapes of Purdah. Women and home are mostly discussed. Due to this conflict, I can tell you about another type, which is mostly in areas close to Mingora. In our village Nawae Kalae and these close by streets we were having a Purdah. As all people, here were known to us and most were family members, women were able to come out easily and move from home to home in this locality. This is important type of Purdah and a social setup that you must observe” (Misbah Ullah, 2017).

Thus, there are at least four forms of Purdah in Swat, which show that Purdah is not only a practice but is an idea that is spread across the society in so many different forms. All these forms and their understandings, as a cultural symbol, have been impacted by the conflict in Swat. Below I briefly comment the filed site, collection of data and the conflict in Swat.

Conflict, Swat and collection of Data

From the broader Pukhtun region, this study focuses on Swat, an administrative district in North-western Pakistan, located in the Pukhtun populated province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (see figure 1 below). It has a population of 2,309,570 (PBS, 2017), where almost 90% of the people are ethnic Pukhtuns (based on Pukhtu as a mother language). Likewise, this study has a specific focus on the recent conflict and violence in Swat as a case study. It was a violent conflict between Muslim militants of the ‘Swati Taliban’⁴ and the Pakistani state military, which started in 2007 when militants almost replaced government authority. Initially a peace deal was signed between government and the militants, which broke up and led to a series of military operations in the region. The Pakistani military ordered Swatis to vacate Swat and move to other districts which caused internal displacement of about 2 million people. Some lived in IDP camps in other districts while others moved to homes of relatives or rented homes. It is considered one of the greatest internal displacements in the history of Pakistan (DMC, 2009; Najam U Din, 2010, p. 5)

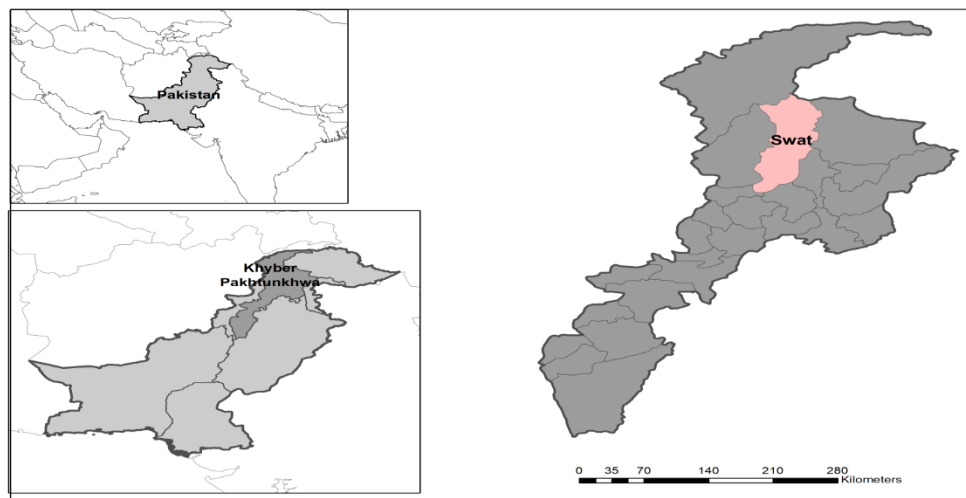


Figure 1: Map showing Pakistani state in a global context and KP (Khyber Pukhtunkhwa) province in Pakistan. On the right side is Swat district in KP.

Data Collection

The empirical data comes from 45 in-depth open-ended interviews, five focus group discussions, and ethnographic observations, collected from November 2016 to May 2017. Data collection was mostly conducted in *Mingora*, *Nawae Kalae*, *Char bagh*, *Kabal*, *Khwaza Khela*, *Saidu Shareef* and *Matta* (see figure below, showing some areas of field work). Participants were elders, university students, professionals, men, women, political workers and others. As the interviews and discussions were largely open-ended and semi-structured, they were appropriate to delve into broader themes of ethnic identity and culture. That is also why the exact duration of interviews and focus groups was not fixed, with interviews and focus group discussions lasting anywhere between 40 minutes four hours. These interactions often included a lunch, tea or dinner break and a stay for the night in participants' homes.

All the interviews and discussions were conducted in the participants' native language, Pukhtu, and by one of the authors, except one interview which was undertaken by a female research assistant, where a male scholar was considered inappropriate to interview a woman. All the interviews and discussions were recorded as field notes, as audio recordings were not appropriate for many reasons. The minimum stay of the author in Swat for a single trip ranged from just two days to almost a week at a time. Moreover, throughout the study I have used pseudonyms. The naming structure used in this study is specific. Name ending with the word 'Khor' (sister in Pukhtu language) is a female participant, otherwise it is a male participant. Likewise, name ending with 'dada' is a male participant with age above 50, considered as elder. Name ending with 'lala' is a male participant with age between 40 and 50 and the rest are younger than 40. In some cases, though I have noted limited information about the participant, I avoid writing it as that may lead to potential identification of the participants. We use this data to analyse the impacts of the conflict on purdah.



(Figure 2: Some areas of field Work) ⁵

Conflict, Violence and Purdah in Swat

Linking conflict and Purdah, we argue that all the forms of Purdah, discussed above, have been influenced in one way or the other by the conflict and violence. The first two forms, that are women Purdah and Home Purdah have been shaped, violated and impacted more than the last two ones, elder men Purdah and locality Purdah. In these two, the first one has been impacted by the militants as well as the military in diverse ways. The second one has been violated and impacted more by the state and its military than the militants. Additionally, I will show that the actions of both actors of the conflict are dubbed as ‘socially unacceptable’, unfortunate and culturally detrimental. Though, significantly, the last two, of elder and specific locality, are less emphasized in the discussions of participants, these have entered the broader concept of Purdah because of sensitization primarily by the conflict. Below is the elaborative discussion and analysis of these arguments, starting from women Purdah.

Conflict and Women Purdah

We argue that there are diverse areas of discussion, in relevance to the militants, in this regard, including, but not limited to, the change in shape of Purdah,

the action of imposing it upon the population, same Purdah for all, irrespective of status or age of women, its attachment with the consideration of Afghan Taliban Purdah as ideal and the liability of punishment for men and women not complying to this. On the military side, the behaviour of military towards the traditional Purdah and the opposition to the one imposed by militants is debated mostly, more particular and central are the programs arranged by state or its military.

Related to militants, there is a contestation among participants on the process of imposition of a specific type of Purdah in Swat. Some participants believe that it was first suggested, emphasized and then imposed by the Taliban, while others believe that it was imposed on first order and there was no chance of any suggestion. There are broader components related to the Purdah setup by militants. A Pukhtun elder, Shams Dada, during a Focused group discussion in Kabal Tehsil of Swat elaborated that:

“Taliban announced through FM Radio Channel that there is no school, no education and no government service for women in Islamic Shariah. Women shall leave such activities as these are against Islamic Shariah. The order of Shariah, Taliban stated, is that women shall not come out of home. If women need to come out to visit a doctor or to bazar, their men shall accompany them while they shall use Shuttle Cock Burqa *only* (Emphasis by participant on the last word)” (Shams Dada, 2017).

The comment is elaborative of some significant points related to militant's agenda of Pukhtun women Purdah. Women were banned from coming out of homes, except for specific reasons, like visiting a doctor. They could come out only if needed, like for a doctor, but shall be relying on men of family to accompany them. Moreover, they shall wear a specific type of burqa/Purdah called shuttlecock burqa, which is considered by the militants as an ideal type because of its use and imposition by the Taliban government in Afghanistan. Likewise, Muhtaram Yusafzai, a University lecturer from Charbagh Tehsil, elaborates about ‘Taliban agenda’, the specific type of Burqa and its adoption from Afghan Taliban as such,

“Taliban initially preached about Burqa as part of their ‘Purdah agenda’. This was a specific form of burqa called shuttle cock Burqa. Due to its attachment with and use by the Taliban in Afghanistan in 1990's, it was taken as ideal Islamic Purdah” (T. Yusafzai, 2017).

Moreover, Shaista Jabeen, a girl working with an NGO in Mingora, recalled about this aspect and expressed her experience as a woman being target of the Taliban program of Purdah. She stated that:

“I was in college at that time and can remember when militants initially preached the importance of Burqa (Shuttle cock) through the FM Radio. On daily basis and mostly on Fridays through the Radio we would listen lectures of Taliban, mostly Fazlullah, emphasizing the need of Purdah and the Islamic nature of Shuttlecock Burqa. When Taliban started to have control in Swat, they ordered to impose it. In our college (and sisters’/relatives’ schools) teachers told us to start wearing burqa (Shuttlecock) while coming to college” (Jabeen, 2017).

These two comments elaborate the militants’ strategy, message and program of women Purdah along with the procedure of applying it to the population. Militants preached, emphasized and then imposed this specific version of Purdah.

However, on the contrary, in an FGD Shams Swati, Abdullah Nangyal and Asif Iqbal agreed with the second perspective that Militants imposed it directly without giving any chance or lessons about it and told me that:

“When Taliban got some authority in Swat, they imposed shuttle cock Burqa on women *directly* in the region and ordered that women shall not come outside of homes. But, if needed, women shall come out only in Shuttle Cock Burqa” (A. Iqbal, 2017; Nangyal, 2017; S. Swati, 2017).

Though we propose that, from these statements and chronology of the literature it becomes clear that in the initial days, militants preached about women purdah and later imposed it through orders. More conclusively, five points of Taliban Agenda related to the feature of Purdah of women and the impacts for it crops up, including, women shall not come out of home, men shall accompany them if coming out for a ‘need’, they shall use shuttlecock Burqa, Shuttlecock burqa is Islamic as it was used by Afghan Taliban and these orders are to be accepted. Along with that it is emphasized that though militants changed the shape and form of traditional Purdah in Swat, they preached (through the FM Radio) first and ordered later. The order was liable to ‘punishment’ by the Taliban, showing that the impact in a cultural ideal was ‘forced’ by them.

About the issue of punishing people who will not accept orders of militants in this regard, a participant Sadeeq Ullah, a university Student, from a 'far' village in Kabal Tehsil narrated one event where he could observe himself.

"I was coming back from the market to home when I saw an Auto (Rickshaw) which was carrying women who sell clothes by visiting homes in different villages. A man who was driving the auto was with them as well. As they reached the Talibans' post and Taliban argued that Purdah of women is 'improper' and despite the orders that women are working outside the home. Thus, they strictly warned the women for a 'last' chance. The driver was beaten by Taliban" (S. Ullah, 2017).

His observation testifies to the fact that militants were serious about their orders and the change in Purdah culture was imposed. Some of the participants, though very few, accepted that the impact was a good one and commented that the act of wearing this specific Burqa is good and Islamic one, a good majority did not agree. Again, many agreed to the fact that the real problem was that it was imposed through 'force' by the militants. Shahid Ahmed, a driver in an organization in Mingora, told me about this issue with elaboration,

"Militants imposed shuttle-cock Burqa, which was good in one sense, because this Burqa covers women completely and can be called a 'true' Islamic Burqa (Purdah), but the issue was that it was imposed upon women which is not good. I believe the imposition was not right (He would say in Pukhtu زبردستی نه وه پکار) (S. Ahmed, 2017).

Thus, there were two groups of people in Swat, based on the perception about shuttlecock burqa as a type of Purdah. One group was not liking this type of Burqa as they favoured the traditional *sadar* and considered this as brought from Afghanistan by the militants. The other group liked this type of Purdah and considered it as better than the traditional one but the fact that it was imposed was considered as 'bad and unacceptable'. This is interesting again as in many cases the traditional Purdah may be imposed by men of the family or even as a social compulsion by the society but when it is imposed by the militants it is considered 'bad'. What literature links Purdah to male autonomy or 'masculinity' and men's control is in relevance to 'family men'. When it is imposed by men other than close men, it is far sure considered a socially unacceptable behaviour and is criticized by many Pukhtuns but if it imposed by family men that is considered as 'social' and 'cultural'. Some cases in imposition have also

got bad and issues cropped up between Swatis and the militants. Naz Khor, a working woman of Mingora recalled,

“When militants imposed on women to wear Shuttle cock burqa in Swat, the situation got worse. I heard from friends and others that some violent cases happened on this issue in other areas. These were between the Taliban and men who accompanied women not wearing Burqa” (Saira Naz Khor, 2017).

The above discussions illustrate that militants’ actions have impacts for women Purdah. These impacts are in many forms, of which the most visible was the strict imposition of shuttlecock burqa for all women in Swat. This act of militants is considered as socially unacceptable and is disliked by the people in Swat, considering it as a violation of Pukhtun women purdah. The story of impacts in women Purdah continues when military operation is undertaken, and Pakistani military takes control of most of the Swat. Pakistani military will have impacts in a different form and will try to discourage, as much as possible, the burqa and Purdah imposed by the militants. Military, knowingly or unknowingly, in the process of discouraging militants ‘Purdah, promote and impose yet a different version of it. I elaborate it in the lines below.

The impacts by military for women Purdah in Swat are in different and diverse forms. When the military got control after the military operation, it started changing things in Swat. Anything associated with the militants was banned, changed, discouraged or looked at with suspicion. The changes come up very quickly as military got hold in Swat. Purdah followed this pattern and a situation was created where shuttlecock burqa was considered ‘bad’ and inappropriate by the military. Discouraging anything associated with the militants was a strategy adopted by the military. Shuttlecock burqa was discouraged through a perception that it is a symbol of the militants ‘violence and backward thinking, though many women would like this type of Burqa to be used. On the contrary as military tried to favour a more modern type of women Purdah that is again disliked by many Swatis.

Moreover, the situation created by military through the programs they arranged was even promoting a Purdah that was different than traditional one and was considered by participants as a violation of Purdah. It promoted gender mixing as much as it could and had little care for the traditions in this regard. Swatis in general dubbed military as unaware of any social or cultural practice among the Pukhtuns in Swat. Connected is the fact and perception of cropping up of NGOs when military

have hold, and both the NGO and military promote an agenda of 'westernization'. An elder, Shams Dada, from Kabal recalls,

“When Pakistani military came, it abruptly changed the ambiance (his Pukhtu statement was rather *ماحول یکدم بدل شو*). They provided contexts where women Purdah will be discouraged by them or in their patronage. NGOs emerged in Swat after military campaign, which make 'we Swatis' *western*. I believe that this military and NGOs are trying to take our Purdah away from us”(Shams Dada, 2017).

As the field data shows, these sudden impacts and changes by Pakistani military are in two forms. First, initially due to security situation military banned the use of Burqa imposed by militants (the shuttlecock) and second military arranged programs where the traditional Purdah will not be cared. Moreover, Shams Dada's statement that these military men and NGOs are making us western is part of a larger feeling in Swat that military is allied with western states, like the US, and NGOs are western or funded by the west. Both these factors are connected to the violation of cultural traditions like Purdah. A university student, Iqbal, commented, “*Military discouraged Shuttle Cock Burqa. Their opinion was that it is because of the security reasons. Pakistani military thought that a man from Taliban can easily hide in this and pose a security threat*”(A. Iqbal, 2017). However, banning the shuttlecock burqa was probably for a specific time. It was mostly in the initial days of post military operations period when shuttlecock burqa was banned and discouraged, the situation today is different but more generally people do not like that form of burqa now.

Interestingly and yet significantly, opinion, observation and personal experience of even working women about the issue of using shuttlecock burqa or even the fashionable one in the military times in relation to the attitude of the Pakistani state military was similar. A girl, Salma Shah Khor, who is working in an NGO narrated thus:

“After the harsh and inhuman attitude of the Taliban in every respect, especially Purdah and Burqa, the Military relaxed it. Now mostly it is fine to wear anything but favourable was 'not to wear Shuttlecock or other burqa even'. The military and state will favour, in many ways, a girl or woman who is open face or wearing *sadar*. Military was suspicious of shuttlecock burqa as it was inflated with the Taliban. Once we were crossing a military check post, I was searched the most in comparison to other women by the military and lady

police, as I was wearing burqa. The searching of women is mostly done by lady police, standing on a check post with military or inside the cabin, but still searching a woman is something that is not good. Let me tell you that searching a woman, even by a lady police, is considered 'bad' here and most people dislike it but are compelled. This act hurtled me at that time and I still remember it." (Khor, 2017).

This comment and experience show that as Burqa was associated with the militants, it is not liked by the military. Women wearing this may face issues of discrimination on check posts or so. Searching women and then on such a discriminated scale is considered socially unacceptable. Secondly, military is 'blamed' by research participants, who are much conscious about Purdah, of not caring about norms and values of the society and promoting 'openness' or giving 'freedom' to women mostly in the programs arranged by them or under their patronage. This is again done as a reaction to the militants who restricted women more than the 'traditional parameters' even. This is considered as something which is against the social norms, traditional practices and 'unnatural' by many. In the opinion of Muhammad Rehman Dada,

"Military has promoted openness by arranging Programs where gender mixing is allowed and even promoted. I took some female students to such a program once. Though the students were just of school level but as a norm I was caring their Purdah. When I saw that in the program they must be on stage with boys and that they will be filmed by a camera, I did not allow this to be for the students and excused the military officers in charge of the program. I believe, it may be normal for them (the military officers) but it is not for us" (M. R. Dada, 2017).

The level of care about gender mixing is high in most of the Swat and people do not favour it on a school level even. Moreover, the issue of being in a program on a stage and visible to everyone with being filmed creates issues that are far from the scope of this section but having a link with Purdah, such actions are avoided at all costs.

A field observation is also close to this. I was accompanied by Shah Sawar, a Peshawar University student, for a 23rd March program held in the famous Wadudya Hall of Saidu Shareef. The comparing in this program organized by Pakistani military was done by a boy and a girl. Their ages seemed to be in 20's. Shah Sawar commented,

“This is my first time seeing such a happening in Swat. I asked him, what was he referring to? He responded that in Swat a boy and girl are comparing for a program on the stage in public. There are men here watching them and even they are filmed. He went further and told me that look at the girl, leave her open face, even her hair is open. This is ‘new’ in Swat, this is ‘destructive’ for the culture of Purdah” (Sawar, 2017).

Even in Saidu Shareef, a major town close to Mingora and hub of professional people, the action of gender mixing on a stage is perceived as socially bad. The fact that the program is arranged by military makes it a complaint against the state and its military of impacting the cultural tradition of women Purdah in Swat. This has implications for what is considered as a traditional marker of Pukhtun distinctiveness. The discussion of impacts for Purdah in conflict situations in Swat can be taken ahead by exploring the fact that there are impacts for Purdah of Pukhtun home, where mostly women reside, and which is linked to honour, sparking a fierce issue of revenge during ‘normal’ (peace) times. I elaborate that in the next sub-section below.

Impacts of conflict on Home Purdah

We argue that the recent conflict in Swat has multiple impacts for home Purdah. The impact was lesser in the case of militants than the military. As most of the militants were from Swat, they knew the cultural as well as religious symbolism attached with Home Purdah and they did not need to do so, rather they cared about this to some extent. On the other hand, military of the state has often violated home Purdah and the social procedure has not been followed because of the security reasons. This is attributed, indirectly to the perception that military men are not aware of the cultural and social aspects of it as such. However, the broader debate of the impacts for culture or Purdah is as usually attributed to both the groups, with a ‘good’ distance from both. Comments and statements of participants supports such a preposition.

While emphasizing home Purdah, a participant Hayat Khan Dada told me in Swat that ‘Our ceilings have Purdah even *زمنگ خودہ برگو ہم پردہ وی* (refereeing to home Purdah)’. As women reside inside the home, men, other than relatives, are not allowed to enter. Even among relatives, close ones are allowed, and care is taken to allow only male relatives who are acceptable to the men of the home. If there is need of any other man (like a doctor) to enter the home, there is a ‘proper’ social way for that. Women of the home shall move to a side and let the man/men enter, accompanied by men of

the home. In this way, men are avoided to enter home at any cost, however if needed a 'proper social way' is adopted. Violation of home Purdah by anyone can lead to dreadful events as it provokes the honour-shame complex in the society and that links to social derogation in the society.

As militants were from Swat and could understand the significance of this cultural and social feature, they did not violate it much. Likewise, they may have an understanding that it can result in resistance against them. In my whole field work, I could not find any event in my field data related to the militants except one participant, Said Alam, who recalled that,

"Taliban never broke home Purdah except once as much as I remember. Taliban were mostly from Swat and their leadership was also Swati, they understood that this is not according to Pukhtu or Islam. I personally believe that this would have increased resistance against the Taliban if they had crossed homes or entered homes without asking men"(Lala, 2017).

However, militants might have violated home Purdah in some cases but not in many, especially in cases of attacking homes of those who were against them publicly or associated as political figures with the government and military. The opinion related to military of Pakistani state is different in this regard. Along with that its forms are different too and involves complex dimensions, which we discuss here. In one form, it was related to the issue of military posts on top of the hills from where a home is clearly visible. As there are many top areas in Swat, being mountainous spot, this is an issue in many areas. In a normal situation, though people of the region would go up as well and homes can be seen but that is differentiated from the conflict and post conflict situation. Before the conflict, as people were from Swat, mostly local who knows and care about the cultural restrictions and would just pass the higher area above homes in conflict. In post conflict situations, it is a permanent check point of the military who are non Swatis, don't have much understanding of socio-cultural compulsions and focus more on security than culture.

Moreover, the use of technology like a binocular allows the military to violate the home Purdah of Swatis through the symbolic 'gaze'. The fact that homes and women in these are clearly visible to those in the check posts develops a relationship between them and families in the home, where military observer has a more powerful position in comparison to the helpless position of the families in homes. Moreover, no

one in any family knows for a specific time if he/she is being observed or not as they lack knowledge about this. Likewise, the military has knowledge of who is observing whom and at which time. Socio-cultural power, control and authority to visit home or observe a woman can shift from men of the family to men of the military in the form of surveillance that military men do. Purdah as a practice somehow evaporates in such contexts.

This situation was different in the pre-conflict situation. In conflict context, this process is termed as destructive for Purdah. Saleem Shahid from Kabal pointed towards this in his statement as thus,

“In such situations of military control and operations, Home Purdah has been impacted too much. For example, there are posts of military men on top of some areas here or hills around. From there all our homes are clearly visible to the military men. This is done in the name of security but let me tell you that this has not only damaged home Purdah in this area but has shattered it”.(Saleem, 2016).

It shall also be mentioned that some evidences point out to the fact that in ‘Urban’ areas this was slightly different and as people were mostly professional and educated, like in Saidu Shareef, they could complain to the military while people in rural areas, as we will elaborate below, had little access to tell or complain the military. Shams Swati could narrate a happening related to this. He informed me that,

“Once the military men went up a hill top here in this area, from where homes can easily be seen. People (Swatis) from the area gathered and told them not to do so as it is not acceptable. This pressure from people, mostly professionals and village elders, could bring them back”.(S. Swati, 2017).

This shows that the military was at large not caring about this aspect of Purdah much or it had no idea, which is yet more strange. However, in most areas, other than Mingora or Saidu Shareef it has been, and it is normal to have a check post on a high mountain for surveillance and security. The above statement of Shahid Saleem elaborates that and my observation of the fact that he, like many, starts the discussion of Purdah with this very aspect is a powerful opinion.

Other than this ‘non-physical’, ‘virtual’ gaze, another important aspect of the linkage of Military and home Purdah have been during the wave of ‘notorious’ search

operations after Swatis returned in post military operation times, which is the physical entrance to a home. Searching homes, with or without informing anyone, at any time and mostly early morning or dawn, was a normal happening for the military but not for Swatis. The experience is different for different areas and was severe for initial days or even years and in areas far from the centre Mingora believed to be militants' 'hub'. Shams Swati could help in differentiating this between different areas, he informed,

“In military, initially, there was no mechanism or practice to announce or ask for search operation or to knock the door to inform. Initially I will say that they broke Purdah of home very frequently. There was no one to argue with them and if anyone could, military would say that this is for security reasons. They were at the peak of operation and were so much powerful that people could not ask them and even dare to ask. Most of the operations were at night which is yet another issue. People would also argue with them that why men enter homes? Military shall arrange ladies and through them they shall do the operation of searching homes, just as police does. This searching of homes was in the search of Taliban or those who would help them. However, later when the situation calmed down to some extent, a mechanism and system was devised. As the military thought that the real threat, Taliban, has been cleared, they will inform before entering home” (S. Swati, 2017).

This illustrates many connected points and can serve to present the issue, the behaviour, the compliant, the difference in timeline and even the solution to the problem. The argument that military did not care for most of the time about home Purdah is clear, however the intensity has been high in initial days than the later days. The behaviour of the military of entering home, without asking and not letting people argue with them is deemed as something which is socially bad. Likewise, young men like Salman Khan are critical of this act but believe that this has lowered now as situation is getting 'normal'. He told me that,

“Military's act was strange and unusual in the initial days as they would frequently break home Purdah by entering home directly. The problem again was that the search operations were mostly done at early morning 4 to 5 AM. Thanks God, we are out of this to some extent now (F. Khan, 2017)”.

Though, at present such acts by the military are few, these were frequent in start days of the military takeover of Swat. This socially or culturally unacceptable act

of the state military in any form has repercussions for a variety of different processes. Such impacts can also be witnessed in the case of elder men Purdah.

Conflict and elder men Purdah

The conflict in Swat has generated some debate about the Purdah of men, only elders. Among the Pukhtuns, elders normally wear a sheet/sadar which has different sizes and colours. To quote a participant Shams Dada, “As burqa is Purdah for women, sadar is for men. Both show honour and Pukhtu ”(Shams Dada, 2017). In this section I will reflect through some of the field comments the impacts of conflict in Swat for this. Shams dada in Kabal noted that,

“Because of this conflict we are required in some places, like the Judicial complex, to leave these (*sadar*) outside the building while entering. That is why elders as well as Youngers are feeling this as a violation of honour”(Shams Dada, 2017).

Though all the elders in all areas may not be wearing sadar it is considered as a symbol of honour and Purdah. Sadaqat Azim, a participant from Kabal, narrates that:

“Elders are required not to wear large *sadars*. In critical times on check post, military did not allow these for people who would come without vehicles. At times of body search elders were required to take these off. In the same way when we enter buildings having security issues, we are told to take these off. In some cases, people must leave these outside the building and when I see these hanging outside some buildings, I feel ashamed. *Sadar* is a sign of Purdah and honour of elders and those wearing are traditional Pukhtuns (Azim, 2016)”.

This illustrates at the same time the importance of Purdah of elders, the honour attached to it and the impact of conflict over it. It is believed that sadar serves as Purdah and honour for Pukhtun elder men. This is felt with more intensity if an elder is forced to take it off (in the similar way as it is for women). Wearing it is an honour and forced to take it off generates a feeling of shame. In contrast to militants, the military has in many cases or generally the government and state in some forms today even compelling elders to take sadar off which is felt by elders as well as youngers. Shah Sawar told me, “*It was ordered that if you are wearing a sadar while crossing a post, take it off and have it in hand and walk instead of being in a vehicle*” (Sawar, 2017).

This is obviously felt shameful both by elders as well as youngers. This order of the state military based on the perceived security followed a sequence. Saleem, a university student, explained and narrated the whole sequence of this aspect by saying that,

“In the conflict peak times, first the military announced that nobody will wear *sadar*. Then, after some time they said people can use it but not on a check post. If at times an elder will wear it while crossing a check post, they used to take it off and search his body. Then they will rebuke him for not following orders. Even at times, in the peak times, no one was allowed to wear *sadar* at front door of the home” (Saleem, 2016)

This comment illustrates the steps taken by military regarding this aspect. All of these are considered as violating the *Purdah* and honour of especially the elders. Though the situation has changed somehow, observations testify that more generally in Swat those wearing *sadar* are looked at with suspicion or are considered as less modern, in the same way as *burqa* is considered for women.

The conflict in Swat, along with internal displacement across the other districts, caused displacement of Swatis from home village to other villages for many reasons. This process has impacts for *Purdah* of a specific locality that can be a village or a *Mohalla* (like a large street). We briefly comprehend this aspect of *Purdah* below.

Conflict and locality *Purdah*

On a broader level for the whole Swat or many parts of it due to the conflict in the region, *Purdah* of specific locality has been impacted too, which is part of the discussion in Swat. I have elaborated above that there exists sensitiveness and discussions which has cropped up in the conflict and post conflict situations. A tribe or locality has a *Purdah* setup which facilitates the mobility of women in that area and the maintenance of social or moral system in the area through different mechanisms. This is apparently traditional among the Pukhtuns on tribal basis as well as non-tribal basis and is solidified by the fact that many Pukhtuns will not move from one place to another. One tribe or group exists in a place. The recent conflict has impacts for these aspects in discussion of my participants. Through an example a government officer Ashraf Lala discussed this aspect as,

“In Swat or this area now, after the crisis (conflict) there are people from different areas and that impact ‘*Purdah* system’ here, which is problematic. I

can explain this with an example of Zia ul Haq's period in Lahore. As Gen. Zia had a policy of trying to wrap up the system of 'Red light areas', instead of relocating people of red-light area, they were displaced from their locations, which resulted in their spread to areas across the country. Likewise, 'bad' people like Taliban and civilians from other tribes, clans and areas have been compelled to be dispersed from their locations. Now in one area you can have people from different groups, tribes, clans and 'thinking' which make it impossible to have purdah in a village or locality like that of old times. At that time, we used to be a family/clan or group in one area and it was easy to practice"(Ashraf Lala, 2016).

This detail is self-explanatory and can be observed in Swat easily where traditionally it was easy for women to move around in an area believing that all people around are of the same group. So now in a specific area of Mingora one can see people from different tribes, groups and even localities. People from other tehsils will also be here. This makes it difficult for people of other groups or families to stop them from anything considered as bad or socially unacceptable. Women feel more unsafe in such areas as the home may be surrounded by people not from family, tribe or group. Conflict of militants and military has added to the compulsive mobility of people in Swat. Another connected example of a more urban area can be given by the comment of Misbah Ullah in Mingora.

"Initially, Mingora main area was a bazar and it was an area where people from whole Swat were present, however in this near village it was not so. After the conflict, this has also become like a city which is problematic for Purdah. People from every area, tribe, group and of any 'type' are present here which does not allow us to have Purdah of this location" (M. Ullah, 2017).

Through different examples, Misbah Ullah informed me about the issues they are facing now and the hardship they face while dealing someone involved in a morally or socially bad character that 'pollutes' the whole area. Though, I propose that this aspect of impacts may not be much prevalent across most of the Swat, some areas are facing this issue which is connected by people in those areas to the broader discussion of Purdah.

Conclusion

The study has illustrated that Purdah is/has been the central feature of Pukhtu/Pukhtunwali, the Pukhtun culture, which is a part of Pukhtun ethnic identity. The recent conflict and violence in the region have influenced it in many diverse ways

particularly highlighting diverse forms of Purdah. This includes individual women Purdah, purdah of Pukhtun home, purdah of elders and Purdah of a specific locality, group or tribe. In conflict situations, these impacts have been generated by militants as well as military, the two main parties in the conflict of Swat. We have also illustrated above that women in Swat who were generally using a sadar as a purdah were compelled by militants for a specific Purdah, the shuttlecock burqa, in individual form and the military was least sensitive of Purdah or approving of activities resulting in erosion of traditional Purdah, the individual purdah of women in Swat has been impacted. Likewise, when the military of state, in the name of security could enter any home as many times as they could with or without informing men of the home, home Purdah in Swat was 'non-existent'. The opinion is divided in this regard, in respect of militants and military, that the actions of military are socially unacceptable while the militants violated this Purdah in very few cases.

Moreover, Likewise, elder men who were not freely allowed to have a symbolic Purdah by wearing a sadar mostly in government offices of perceived security issues. This is again felt as an impact for Pukhtun elder's Purdah and honour and produces feelings of shame. Additionally, the conflict has left a situation where Purdah in a specific locality is impossible as people from diverse groups, tribes and regions are present across Swat after the conflict. Earlier, before the conflict, people in a specific area were able to have a locality purdah where mostly people from the same group or tribe would reside, allowing for a limited mobility of women and keeping a moral and social level. This is remembered and felt in Swat in a sad tone with a nostalgia for 'traditional Pukhtun Purdah'.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to acknowledge the special financial support of Higher Education Commission Pakistan (for funding a fellowship of first author to the University of Washington) and Matthew Dunbar, Spatial Research Scientist, CSDE, University of Washington (for his help with creating maps for this study).

References

- Ahmed, A. S. (1977). *Social and Economic Changes in the Tribal Areas: 1972-1976*. Karachi: Oxford University Press.
- Ahmed, S. (2017, January 28). Personal Interview/Discussion [Mingora].
- Azim, S. (2016, December 30). Personal Interview/Discussion [Kabal Swat].
- Barth, F. (1969). Pathan Identity and Its Maintenance. In F. Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (pp. 117–134). Illinois: Waveland Press.
- Dada, H. K. (2017, February 5). Personal Interview/Discussion [Mingora].
- Dada, M. R. (2017, January 27). Personal Interview/Discussion [Charbagh Swat].
- Dada, S. (2017, January 26). Focused Group Discussion [Kabal Swat].
- IDMC. (2009). *Pakistan: Millions of IDPs and returnees face continuing crisis*. Geneva, Switzerland. Retrieved from www.internal-displacement.org
- Iqbal, A. (2017, January 25). Focused Group Discussion [Saidu Shareef Swat].
- Ishtiaq, M. (2016, December 16). Personal Interview/Discussion [Saidu Shareef Swat].
- Jabeen, S. (2017, April 28). Focused group Discussion [FizzaGut Mingora Swat].
- Jan, M. A. (2010). *Contested and Contextual Identities: Ethnicity, Religion and Identity among the Pakhtuns of Malakand, Pakistan*. University of York, UK.
- Khan, F. (2017, January 27). Personal Interview/Discussion [Charbagh Swat].
- Khor, S. N. (2017, April 28). Personal Interview/Discussion [Saidu Shareef Swat].
- Khor, S. S. (2017, April 28). Personal Interview/Discussion [FizzaGut Mingora Swat].
- Lala, A. (2016, December 31). Personal Interview/Discussion Ashraf lala Government Officer TMA/45, Kabal 31/12/2016 [Kabal Swat].
- Lala, S. Alam. (2017, January 26). Focused Group Discussion [Dherai Swat].
- Najam U Din. (2010). *Internal Displacement in Pakistan: Contemporary Challenges*. Qasim Press Railway Road, Lahore Pakistan: Human Rights Commission of Pakistan.
- Nangyal, A. (2017, January 25). Focused group Discussion [Saidu Shareef Swat].
- PBS. (2017). Pakistan Bureau of Statistics | 6th Population and Housing Census. Retrieved October 22, 2017, from <http://www.pbscensus.gov.pk/>
- Saleem, S. (2016, December 31). Personal Interview/Discussion [Hazara Kabal].
- Sawar, S. (2017, March 23). Personal Interview/Discussion [Matta Swat].
- Swati, S. (2017, January 25). Focused group Discussion [Saidu Shareef Swat].
- Ullah, M. (2017, January 1). Personal Interview/Discussion [Mingora].
- Ullah, S. (2017, February 5). Personal Interview/Discussion [Kabal Swat].
- Yusafzai, T. (2017, January 27). Personal Interview/Discussion [Charbagh Swat].

Notes:

¹ The word Purdah has been used in the literature and in social interaction in both Pukhtun and non Pukhtun societies. However, the names/words used here for these four forms are adopted from the field discussions and are used by the research participants.

² The word Purdah has been used in the literature and in social interaction in both Pukhtun and non Pukhtun societies. However, the names/words used here for these four forms are adopted from my field discussions and are used by my participants, though I have observed it as a native of Pukhtun region too.

³ Locally this is called fashionable Burqa, it is also called “Abaya” and seems to have been adopted from Arab culture as women in Arab countries mostly wear this. Such a Burqa is mostly black in colour but can also be colourful.

⁴ Mullah Fazlullah of Swat was also joined by a number of Non-Swati elements including the Ghazi Brigade (post lal masjid group), which had even Punjabi roots (see https://web.archive.org/web/20100816223508/http://www.jamestown.org:80/uploads/media/TM_008_63.pdf). See But as many of these militants were from Swat, mainly their leadership, and they were operating in Swat, people called them Swati Taliban.

⁵ Source: http://www.mapsguidesandmore.com/Pakistan-Khyber_Pukhtunkhwa)