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Swat Conflict in Retrospect: Violence and Jarga among the Swat Pukhtuns in Pakistan

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Abstract

This study reflects the impacts of conflict and violence on culture, specifically a single cultural code known as Jarga. Methodologically, the study is based on an ethnographic fieldwork, comprised of 45 open-ended and in-depth interviews, five FGDs and personal observation. Through the conflict in Swat and Pukhtun cultural code of Jarga, it contends that conflict and violence in Swat has multiple and significant impacts for Jarga. Jarga on higher level, like the *Swat Qaumi Jarga* (Swat National Jarga) has been more active since 2007, while Jarga on lower (village) level has lost its practice in many areas of Swat. Militants and Pakistani state have been often involved in forming, using, and manipulating Jargas in Swat amidst the conflict. Moreover, the conflict has repercussions for *Tanzeems* (local organizations) and committees, which were sharing work and place with Jarga in Swat. The state institutions have introduced Village Defence Committees which have bypassed all the existing committees and organizations mainly due to their enhanced powers. These processes have added to 'defaming' the cultural ideals, which is socially an unacceptable and detrimental development for Pukhtun society. The conflict and violence has impacted the markers and codes of cultural and ethnic distinctiveness.

Keywords: Violence, Conflict, Militancy, Terrorism, Jarga, Jirga, Pakhtunkwai, Ethnicity, Pukhtunwali, Culture, Ethnic Identities, Conflict Resolution, Swat.

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1.   Introduction

Pukhtuns, Pakhtuns, Pashtuns and Pathans are different names used for the same ethnic group living in Pakistan and Afghanistan.[1] Pukhtuns comprises the largest by population in Afghanistan, which is estimated to be around 42% (Library of Congress, 2008). However, Pukhtuns are the second largest ethnic group after Punjabis in Pakistan (PBS, 2017). Pukhtuns have an ethnic identity which comprises of different aspects and markers including Pukhtun culture, Pukhtunwali, ascribed aspects and ethnic relations (Ahmed, 1977; Barth, 1969; Jan, 2010). Pukhtunwali is a contested and incomplete list of different features some of which are Purdah, Hujra, Melmastya, Jarga, Izzat, Gham-Khadi and others (Ahmed, 1977, 1980; Azim, 2019; Azim, Jan & Williams, 2018; Barth, 1969; Jan, 2010; Lindholm, 1996; Rome, 2013). Significantly, much of the Pukhtun region in Pakistan has witnessed violence and conflict of militants and military for the one and half decade.

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Violent conflicts have perpetual and perennial impacts on societies. Culture and ethnic identities of the people are no exception. Militants under the leadership of Mullah Fazlullah in Swat[2] started a violent campaign against the State of Pakistan and declared to enforce their own version of strict brand of Islamic law (Shariah) in 2007. Violence was spread through killing, bombing, flogging, and beheading people who could oppose them or who were associated with Pakistani state or government. Social way of life was affected severely, and society was soon dominated by terror and fear. The provincial government, in a bid to control the situation, did a controversial peace deal with militants and passed *Nizam-e-Adal* regulations in Swat and Malakand districts (Shah, 2009). The deal and regulations did not achieve the target of peace and justice. However, it helped the militants in terms of gaining time and an opportunity to spread their network in the neighbouring regions like Buner and Dir.

The writ of the state was continuously challenged by the militants after the deal. The Government of Pakistan and the state institutions especially the military and intelligence agencies were questioned by the people and civil society organisations. More troops were thus moved to curtail the activities of the militants. A series of military operation was started in Swat and other districts of Malakand division, which intensified and prolonged the conflict for years. The conflict also caused internal displacement of about 2 million people. It is largest internal displacements in the history of Pakistan (iDMC, 2009; Din, 2010, p. 5). The conflict and violence in the region have multiple impacts for the socio-cultural lives of Pukhtuns. Diverse socio-cultural codes, values, and institutions of Pukhtunwali have witnessed multiple impacts due to conflict and violence. As the detailed discussion is not possible on all the features of Pukhtun culture in this study, therefore, we have focused only on role of Jarga as a socio-cultural and ethnic feature.

This article discusses the interplay of recent conflict and violence in Swat with special focus on Jarga. It has been analysed that the role of Jarga has gained importance in conflict and post conflict situations in Swat and that is the reason *Swat Qaumi Jarga* has been active for more than a decade. We also suggest that militants and military in the recent conflict have often stopped local/village level Jargas from working at one time and manipulated these when required at other times During the conflict, militants used Jarga to decide cases with Islamic Laws (Shariah) and thus fill the gap of quick justice left by the Pakistani state. However, when militants observed that some Jargas are supported and used by the government and military against militants, they stopped these Jargas from working and targeted its leaders (even killed) to hamper its role.

The military also considered Jarga as one of the best solutions for influencing and enforcing its own decisions and the state narratives in the Swat. That is the reason, military and other state institutions manipulate and influence Jarga and has subsequently changed its shape while using it for its interests. Pakistani state and military have also introduced and backed organizations and committees on village basis like the Aman committees and Village Defence Committees (VDC). We also postulate that the nature and working of Jarga and these parallel organizations and committees in the name of conflict resolution bodies is far different from that of the traditional ones. Moreover, these bodies have made the role of Jarga more controversial, and which has been subjected to criticism. This entire process impacts the tradition of Jarga and the linked committees and other organizations in Swat. It has added to the 'defaming' and manipulation of a cultural ideal in the Swat which is considered by majority of the participants as a socially unacceptable development.

2.   Literature Review

Jarga is the name of an assembly and a forum used for consultation, deliberation, decision making, conflict management, conflict resolution and adjudicating justice in Pukhtun populated areas. It has been translated as 'council of elders' (Ahmed, 1980) and 'public assemblies' (Barth, 1959, p. 115). Barth termed these as *acephalous councils* i.e., having no executive head, comprising of land owning Pukhtuns (Barth 1959) and also called it an 'adhoc meeting' for a specific task or an 'instituted tribunal' (Barth, 1969, p. 121). It is a traditional cultural institution of Pukhtunwali which performs diverse functions, primarily from the decision making to adjudicate justice (Ahmed, 1980, p. 90; Ali & Rehman, 2001, p. 51; Wardak, n.d.).

Decisions of Jarga are made through consensus and unanimity but never on majority (Taizi, 2007, p. 8), due which, all the decisions are binding (Ahmed, 1980, pp. 90-91). These decisions are mostly based on tribal and cultural conventions and traditions, Islamic law (Shariah), a combination of both Islam and Pukhtun customs (Ahmed, 1980, pp. 90-91) and principle of justice. Moreover, only men of the society take part in the proceeding of Jargas, however, there are precedents that females are also given representation through their nominee, if required. Jarga has multiple forms and types. Its members can be Pukhtun elders, chiefs, Khans, land owning Pukhtuns, religious clergy and other influential people of the society (Ahmed, 1980, p. 90; Ali & Rehman, 2001, pp. 50-57; Wardak, n.d, pp. 6-14). A member in Jarga can also be selected by the villagers to represent them in a clan or by a clan to represent it in a tribe and so on (Rome, 2013, p. 97). The meeting of a Jarga may be held publicly in an open place, a mosque or a hujra.

Though some of the literature describes popularity and somewhat 'romantic' role of Jarga in Pukhtun region, yet, in Swat valley its position has been different in various period of times. There are four chronological and historical stages based on the presence and working of Jarga in the history of Swat. These are 'pre-Swat state stage' starting from the 16th Century Yusafzai settlement in Swat (Rome, 2017), the 'Swat state stage' from 1915 to 1969 (Barth, 1985, pp. 57, 74; Barth, 1959, pp. 67, 115; Barth, 1981, p. 177; Rome, 2006, p. 9; Rome, 2008), the 'post-merger stage' from 1970 to 2006-07 (Lindholm, 1982, p. 75; Rome, 2011, pp. 63-64, Rome, 2012) and the recent 'militancy and conflict stage' from 2007 to 2017. Moreover, local organizations and committees (locally called *Tanzeem*) which are close in nature and work to the Jarga have evolved mostly on local level in the post-merger stage. There were some temporary as well as permanent bodies which still exist in the community. Though these organisations and committees have primarily focused on reformative and welfare work, yet they were often used by the people for solving local disputes and enmities. In some cases, even the lower courts have used to send cases to the Jarga for settlement, but, subject to the consent of both parties (Rome, 2011).

In this sequence the fourth and most recent stage, which is the focus of this study, is the stage of militancy, conflict and violence in Swat from the year 2007 onwards. The bulk of literature discussed above does not focus on discussing and elaborating the impacts of militancy, conflict and violence in Swat on the role and structure of Jarga. Thus, in this study we have explored the relationship of militancy, conflict and violence with the informal institution of Jarga in Swat. Before further discussion, we briefly reflect upon the research method and collection of primary data for this study.

3.   Materials and Methods

The empirical data for this study, which comes from 45 in-depth open-ended interviews, five Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and ethnographic observations, was collected from November 2016 to May 2017. Data collection was conducted in diverse parts of district Swat situated in Malakand Division, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan. Participants were both men and women including elders, university students, professionals, and political and social workers. The interviews and FGDs were taken on semi-structured schedules, lasting anywhere between 40 minutes and four hours. All the interviews and FGDs were conducted in the participants' native language, Pukhtu (Pashtu). Notes of the interviews and FGDs were taken in the field. Audio recordings were not appropriate due to the security reasons in the region and sensitivity of the nature of the study.

Throughout the writeup of the study we have used pseudonyms. The naming structure used in this study is specific and uniform style. Name ending with the word 'Khor' (sister in Pukhtu language) is a female participant, otherwise the participant is a male. Likewise, name ending with 'dada' is a male participant with age above 50 years, who is considered as elder in the society. Name ending with 'lala' is a male participant with age between 40 and 50 years and the remaining are younger than 40 years. Though we have noted limited information about the participants, we avoided writing of the exact names or other details in this study. It is because disclosure of such details may lead to potential identification of the participants.

4.   Discussion and Findings

This field data collected through key informant interviews, focus group discussion and personal observations is used for the arguments presented in below analysis and discussion of main part of the study in line with the theoretical and conceptual literature discussion above.

4.1.   Militants, Jarga and Committee in Swat

Initially, the Jarga was used by militants, and it later challenged them also due to differences. Militants often used Islamic law (Shariah) in Jarga and their local courts in Swat. As Jarga and similar other forums were effective to solve enmities and problems, the militants extended their support. Abolishing it directly may have caused a backlash to militants, so it was manipulated and used but not abolished at once by the militants. When militants started spreading violence in Swat, Jarga and other similar forums were (in most areas) the only tool to debate about militant's activities and to hinder militant's progress. An issue was that members of Jarga and similar forums and organizations were not united on the security issue amidst the polarization of conservative and moderate groups in the society.

Additionally, militants had support from extremists and fundamentalist sections of the society, so it was not possible to develop a consensus against them. Also, the Jargas often faced the issue of developing unanimity in their decisions and difficulty in imposition of its decisions. As an imbalance in 'authority' had occurred in society, Jarga was often unable to exercise its decisions and had to play suggestive role only. 'Jarga became just a suggestive body to the government and had no mechanism to frame rules or impose their decisions.' Likewise, when militants had 'greater' control of the region, Jarga was expected to adopt another significant and crucial role. In some areas, Jarga played a significant role and resisted the violent progress of militants. Some of these Jarga were much significant as they declared that People of Swat

shall be against militants but not with government and military. The aim of these Jarga was to work for the betterment of the people of Swat and to avoid or stop violence in the region.

When opposition increased against militants mostly by 'Khans' and elites of Swat, an attempt was made by these Khans to use Jarga and tribal forces (Lashkar) in opposition to militants. Some of these Jarga were backed by the Pakistani state, its government and military. Due to the conflict, society in Swat was polarized and it was not possible for any forum to be neutral or work without the support of militants or military, thus Jarga could not remain neutral too. Likewise, Pakistani government was interested in using Jarga for its own interests. Thus, Jarga and its members were often targeted by militants without any care for elders (*Masharan* or *Speengheeri*). Any member believed by militants to be significant and influenced by the state was targeted. Specifically, any Jarga or committee (and its members), which was formed at the behest of a Khan/elite or Pakistani state or supported by Pakistani state was at the hit-list of the militants. A participant, Muhammad Farooq, along with other members of focussed group discussion agreed that many committees (especially the peace committees) and Jarga were targeted by militants, because they were headed or even formed by local Khans or backed by the government and military. They stated:

> "Militants bypassed all these, committees, Jarga and organizations etc for several reasons. For example, one reason was that many of these were headed by local Khans, who were not supportive of militants and were rather supported by the government" (Farooq, 2017; Gul, 2017; Mudasir, 2017).

The Jarga, which initially tried to be 'neutral' amidst the polarization of militants and military in Swat, have been victims of different intense type of target killings. Anyone attached as a member to such a Jarga or more generally demanding or supporting peace, became victim of target killing by 'unknown personnel.' The Pakistani state blamed the militants for these activities and claimed that these unidentified personnel are militant groups who target the local people who gather for peace or raise voice for the betterment of the people of Swat. However, conspiracy theories surround such characters of unidentified personnel, where the local people doubt involvement of both the militants and the Pakistani state. Yusuf Khan, a local Khan and elder in Dherai Swat stated:

> "People felt the need of Jarga. They also gathered to become united for peace, but they were targeted. A Loya Jarga was held at an area known as Zahid Khan in Mingora, which he assisted in its arrangement. He was targeted but was fortunately safe.[3] A lawyer who addressed the Jarga was later killed" (Khan, 2017).

Another participant, Iqbal Lala from Kabal Swat stated:

> "A Jarga was framed against militancy in the leadership of Afzal Khan Lala.[4] Most of the members of this Jarga were later targeted by militants including Afzal Khan Lala, but fortunately, he remained safe" (Lala, 2016a).

In case of such targeted killings, people argue that if these are done by the militants, state military does not act promptly to counter it. This process developed an enhanced need for a Jarga out of the influence of militants and Pakistani state military. Muhammad Ishtiaq from Mingora Swat stated:

> "Due to the conflict, Jarga gained an important role, as in times of fear, people needed it" (Ishtiaq, 2016).

Though it was needed by the people, its members could not remain neutral and most of them were often supported and manipulated by the Pakistani state. Initially, due to lack of this support, the Jarga remained unable to perform its routine functions, and this had implications for the process of conflict resolution and local decision making by the people of Swat. With the fact that working of the Jarga was halted, often stopped (initially) and manipulated, it created a gap and trust deficit between the state/government and people of Swat. Moreover, the voice of people of Swat was not heard outside in this crucial time. Saleem Lala pointed out:

> "As Jargas and elders were targeted by militants initially and 'unknown personnel' later, there was no one to act as a linkage between the people of Swat and the state. There was no one to inform other people, outside Swat, about the issues of the people of Swat" (Lala, 2016b).

This has implications for the society of Swat. The state of Pakistan, its government and the military have affected the informal institution of Jarga, local organisations and committees in yet different forms.

4.2.   Manipulating Jarga, Organizations and Committees: The Role of Pakistani State

To counter the intense conflict and violence of the militants, mostly Khans, other influential elders and political elites of Swat formed Jarga by the name of *Aman Jarga* (Peace Jarga). These were used to unite the people of Swat against the militants, discuss and decide strategies to counter them. *Aman Jarga* like the *Nikpi Khel Aman Jarga* worked for some time as the only forums outwardly negotiating or working as a bridge between the military and the militants. However, after the defeat of Taliban its role took a turn. These were used and manipulated against militants by Khans and Pakistani state, the government and military in Swat due to which their role became much controversial. Majority of these *Aman Jarga* are devoid of the traditional nature and role of the institution of Jarga and are formed and supported by the Pakistani state, the military or the civil government, and not by the people of Swat, which affects the working of Jarga.

Sultan-i-Rome, a scholar from Swat has written extensively on the historical as well as contemporary situation in Swat. He notes about a form of Jarga established in the context of conflict by saying:

> "Some Jarga in the name of Peace Jarga have been formed, by and at the behest of the army" (Rome, 2011, p. 73).

Further he writes:

> "The Jarga formed in Swat in the post-Taliban scenario are devoid of these ingredients and characteristics. Not only these Jarga are manoeuvred one way or another, but the decisions made and pronounced by them are also manoeuvred. Hence their decisions also lack the essence and spirit as well as the force and legitimacy of the traditional one" (Rome, 2011, p. 74).

These statements point towards the role of conflict in shaping and using Jarga and its name. Peace Jarga is the target of this study which emerged after Pakistani military cleared parts of Swat from the operation against militants. The statement is persuasive of the argument that such a use of Jarga and its name by the Pakistani state is a process that affects Jarga as a traditional mechanism. The formation of such Jarga is cultural and tribal ethos of the Pukhtuns. Moreover, the decisions are even made by the Pakistani State, which is against the tribal or traditional conventions of Jarga. They lack the spirit and legitimacy of traditional Jarga because people know that the forces behind these do not represent the local community.

Likewise, as these are manipulated or formed by the state and its military, militants have been targeting members of such Jarga with full intensity. However, some of the Jarga criticized both the militants and military for example Swat Qaumi Jarga has been holding sessions and press conferences on many issues of Swat, most particularly, the issue of military presence in post operation period and building a cantonment in Swat. Initially, when militants were growing their network, this Jarga urged the government to take steps for curbing militants in the region. It demanded 'exemplary punishment' for militants and their leadership, including Sufi Muhammad. It also criticized the military for treating people of Swat as 'third-class citizens.' The Jarga members claimed that like the security forces, the people of Swat have also given sacrifices for peace and should be treated in decent manner by the security and law enforcement agencies. Swat Qaumi Jarga also suggested the government and security forces not to negotiate with militants until they get unarmed. It also demanded that the military should vacate the educational institutions and private houses, which it has occupied as base camps during the military operations. It is interesting to point out that the people demanded the military to handover authority to civilian law enforcement agencies, particularly the police. It also demanded that people of Swat should be treated fairly and with dignity on the security check posts and Pukhtun cultural values shall be taken care of while doing search operations of individuals and houses (Dawn, 2014a; Dawn, 2014b; Dawn, 2009; Dawn, 2010; Dawn, 2011; Dawn, 2012; Dawn, 2014; Rehman, n.d.; The Express Tribune, 2014).

Swat Qaumi Jarga held a press conference on 30th October 2014 in the Swat Press Club and demanded that the military shall not establish military cantonment(s) in Swat and that the army shall be called back from Swat. Another gathering was arranged by a Jarga claiming to be Swat Qaumi Jarga under the auspices of military and civil administration for countering the demands of the earlier Jarga. This Jarga offered conditional support for the establishment of a military cantonment in Swat. The Jarga was held in Wadudya Hall in Saidu Sharif Swat and was attended by officials of the civil administration of Malakand division, elected representatives of district Swat, elders, and local leaders of political parties. This so called Jarga, which was rather a gathering of government servants and so-called agents of declared to extend its support for the establishment of cantonment in Swat on a pre-condition that that the military will be limited to the cantonment(s) and security check posts will be handed over to the police. Some members also demanded for a quick and decent individual searches/examinations of the people of Swat on the security check posts (Dawn, 2014b). However, as stated above, there are claims, that initially Swat Qaumi Jarga declared that military should be called back from Swat if it considers that the military operation against the militant has been successful. They further declared that local administration and local cultural institutions should be allowed to work independently in Swat. If the military insists to stay in Swat, the Jarga insisted that it will declare the operation as unsuccessful, and that militants are still a threat in Swat. Thus, a resolution was passed with a conditional support of military presence in Swat and establishment of cantonment (Dawn, 2009).

Based on above discussion, we argue that though formed, used, and manipulated by the Pakistani state, government, and military, the institution of Jarga in existing forms has grown its significance and performance. Moreover, the composition, nature, and functions of some of these Jarga are far different than the traditional ones. This adds to the defaming of traditional Jarga on one side and romanticizes the institution of Jarga on the other side, though it may not be as relevant and functional as it was earlier in Swat. Committees and local organizations which were present in Swat before the conflict and worked as an alternate to Jarga in some areas or working alongside Jarga in other areas, have also witnessed different implications. In the below discussion, we have elaborated the interplay of conflict with local organizations/Tanzeems and local committees in Swat.

4.3.   The Village Defence Committees

To counter militancy during initial period, Peace Committees (*Aman Committees)*, were formed by local elites of Swat, which were backed by the government of Pakistan. These were soon replaced by the introduction of controversial committees by the Pakistani military in the name of Village Defence Committees (VDCs). VDCs have bypassed all the old committees and local organizations because of the support of military. Moreover, VDCs have grown more controversial, manipulated by the state of Pakistan, which adds to defaming of reformative and welfare committees in the region. There is a specific linkage of the post conflict situation to VDCs. When government (particularly the military) took control of Swat after military operations, it replaced most of the existing committees and bypassed all through the VDCs. These were constituted on village basis with a main responsibility to keep an eye on militants in their respective villages and inform law-enforcement agencies of any suspicious person in their areas. Members of VDCs enjoy protocol and have a special identity card which enables them to attain a special treatment in society and government institutions. The Pakistani military issued these cards and fully assisted the members these committees. However, due to the backing of the military, all VDC members are on the hit list of the militants. Persons in the name of 'unidentified shooters' have been targeting these people. Many of its members have been killed and many injured after targeted shooting.[5]

It is interesting to mention that in *Bara Bandai* of Swat, publicly displayed posters were by the VDC members and militants were seen. The militants posted posters naming members of the committee and warning them of consequences for joining VDCs. The VDC members also responded by posting posters and challenging militants to come out of hideouts and fight them in open. Members of VDCs claimed that the villagers are supporting them against the militants (The News, 2010). However, the opinion of people of Swat is divided on the support for VDCs, its nature and working. Some of the participants of the study viewed these VDCs significant for peace in Swat, while majority of them were suspicious and critical about them. To them, members of VDCs have become more powerful and are 'elites' in this regard. This is because of the support of the military, which is the most powerful law enforcement state institution in Swat. Besides, it is believed that personal enmities and revenge may be taken by these committee members from anyone, which puts a serious question mark on impartiality of these committees and integrity of their members.

Significant point during this study is the process of lowering the role and function of existing committees, Jarga or Tanzeem in some areas and replacing these altogether in other areas. Reservations about this process are expressed in different statements by the participants of the study along with the media reports. Participants of Saidu Sharif in the FGD expressed that old

committees (mostly called committee system) are left only to assist the people during death rituals and marriage or other ceremonies as they are unable to solve local enmities or discuss critical issues. One of the participants, Hamdard Shah commented, and others agreed:

> "After the conflict, it (committee system) was replaced by Aman Committees, whose members were targeted by militants. In most areas VDCs have now replaced them. Tanzeem have become very weak in their working now. They are only extending assistance and sympathies to people in their sorrows. Committees formed or backed by the government are powerful. These also taken over the role of Tanzeem in solving local disputes" (Iqbal, 2017; Nangyal, 2017; Shah, 2017; Swati, 2017).

Muhammad Iqbal Lala, a member of such Tanzeem commented:

> "During conflicts, the Jarga like organizations were only holding corner meetings as it was not possible to challenge people involved in the conflict" (militants and military) (Lala, 2017).

An elder, Laiq Dada summarized the relationship of conflict, Jarga and VDC in a statement:

> "The role and working of Jarga has been finished now and replaced by VDCs which operates in Swat now very actively" (Dada, 2017).

The performance of these VDCc, the method of their working, the behaviour of their members, their position to replace existing Jarga, local organizations and committees or being parallel to these Jarga and local organizations, and the fact that these are formed by and operated by the military are aspects which are interesting and where the opinion is somehow divided. A small section of the society believes that VDCs are more efficient than traditional Jarga, and they are needed in Swat because the old Tanzeem were not remarkably effective. On the other hand, majority of the participants in Swat believed that VDCs and its members are not efficient as claimed. Moreover, its membership and the criteria are also controversial because it does not follow any social, cultural, or institutional rules and is based on loyalty towards Pakistani government and military. Likewise, the behaviour of its members and the elite status they are gaining with their alleged misuse of authority is another criticism. Some participants even claimed that VDCs are not natural entities of the society hence no needed in Swat. However, they are 'imposed' upon the people of Swat as an alternate to Jarga or Tanzeem which are considered as part of their culture, local traditions and are thus 'natural' entities of Swat. Moreover, the status of its members is not very appreciable due to the selection process and the role they are playing. Muhammad Mudasir, like others, agreed in a Focused Group Discussion (FGD) in Kabal Swat:

> "Military, government and Pakistani state, has established VDCs as a replacement of Aman committees. In fact, VDCs were imposed upon people of Swat by the state institutions. Members of these VDCs enjoy protocol from the government and even have a special identity card issued by the military" (Farooq, 2017; Gul, 2017; Mudasir, 2017).

The way Jarga and Local Tanzeem has been undermined, the Peace Committees were allowed to be established and then replaced with the VDCs and even the recent use of Swat Qaumi

Jarga by the military, the government and other state institutions for their interest, points out a situation that is compulsive.

5.   Conclusion

Conclusively, we argue that due to the conflict in Swat, on one side Swat Qaumi Jarga is trying to emerge with a more significant and active role, on the other side Village Jarga and Committees/Tanzeems have grown weaker, and most have been left with no option but to stop their working. Their tasks are closely observed by security agencies and other government institutions along with VDCs, which are connected to the central authority of Pakistani state. Significantly, most of these structural and institutional changes are considered as 'unwanted' and socially 'detrimental.' A critical opinion of the participants also points out the fact that Jarga is manipulated and used by the elites of Swat, Pakistani government and other state institutions. Therefore, it may not be much effective in this context with its history of manipulation, low existence and less acceptability in Swat. Likewise, the manipulation of Jarga has been a common practice, both by militants and military in Swat, which is criticized by Pukhtun in Swat.

The controversial position of VDCs adds to the complexity of debate. The transformation in Jarga and its types also shows that Jarga as well as Pukhtunwali is not a static cultural code but is dynamic in its nature and working. During crisis, the importance of Jarga, especially on a higher-level increase and the recent conflict in Swat testifies this argument. On the other side, as an impact, the number of Jarga has reduced to the lowest on village level. The attendance in Jarga has also become lowered, except the Swat Qaumi Jarga. This has also resulted in lowering the ability and effectiveness of Jarga for managing local issues and resolving enmities and conflicts among the people. The significance of Jarga has lowered with its non-functional status in the areas where VDCs are more active. In Swat, this is connected to the weakness of Pukhtun in preserving and practicing the culture of Jarga and is linked to the impacts and repercussions for Pukhtun culture (Pukhtunwali).

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Notes:

[1] Participants of data collection during key informant interviews and focussed group discussions in the field used the term Pukhtun, that is why in this study we have used this term.

[2] Swat, is an administrative district in North-western Pakistan, located in the Pukhtun populated province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. It has a population of 2,309,570 (PBS, 2017) where majority of the people are ethnic Pukhtuns (based on Pukhtu as a mother tongue or first language).

[3] Zahid Khan, president of 'Swat Hotels Association,' a critic of militants and the military has been targeted several times by 'unidentified shooter.'

[4] Afzal Khan Lala was a prominent political leader and former member of provincial assembly from Swat.

[5] An unofficial data reveals that over 50 village defence committee members or peace activists have been killed by suspected militants from 2009 to 2016 (Khaliq, 2014; Khaliq, 2016).