

# THE 19<sup>TH</sup>-AND EARLY 20<sup>TH</sup>-CENTURY U.S. WOMEN'S RIGHTS STRUGGLE: IMPLICATIONS FOR CONTEMPORARY AFGHANI AND PAKISTANI PASHTUN WOMEN

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## Abstract

*Although there may be strikingly different cultural explanations, in nearly every society women have had to struggle for equal rights. This study juxtaposes the position of U.S women in the 1910s and contemporary Pashtun women in Afghanistan and Pakistan to present an authentic picture of Pashtun women in an international context. Avoiding generalizations, the author focuses on select issues important to Pashtun women living in Swat, KP, Pakistan, the homeland of Malala Yousafzai. In addition to American scholarship, for the Pashtun part, the study relies on authentic sources: personal interviews with Malala, her father as well as a few notable indigenous professors and authors; literary/social surveys (of Swat); indigenous books. The study also includes a cross-section of native Pashtun men/women living in Swat, and the author's firsthand experiences as a native of Swat. The study reviews the struggle for women's rights in the U.S to ask what from that experience can aid Pashtun women one hundred years later.*

**Key Words:** U.S women, Afghani-Pakistani-Pashtun women, 20<sup>th</sup>-century, women's rights.

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## **1) Introduction**

Across the globe in almost every culture, women, at some time, have been oppressed by religious extremism, cultural constraints, or social norms, etc. The difference lies only in degree of oppression. The trajectory of women's rights in the United States till the 1920s and in the Pashtun regions of Afghanistan and Pakistan in 2010s illustrates the universal problems of women's struggle for equality across time, language, culture, religion, nationality, and geography. This study argues that the 1920s women's struggle in the U.S. could influence the contemporary struggle of their Pashtun sisters in Afghanistan and Pakistan in the 2010s. Despite the hundred-year gap, comparing U.S. and Pashtun women's struggles for liberty may help the world to reconsider Pashtun women's position in an international context. Like American women in the initial stage of their struggle, Pashtun women are trying to rise despite fierce opposition from locals, despite voices calling for "tradition," another term, in this case, for the status quo or inequality. Like Louisa May Alcott and Kate Chopin, Pashtun female writers like Hasina Gul, are voicing their cause in literature. The youngest Nobel Laureate from Swat, Pakistan, Malala Yousafzai (named "after the Malalai of Maiwand, who inspired the Afghan army to defeat the British in the second Anglo-Afghan war in 1830"), is trying to lead Pashtun women toward their inalienable rights, like Jane Addams and Elizabeth Cady Stanton before her. Though there are fundamental disparities between the two societies, the women's struggle for equality may be seen as an ongoing global issue that transcends societal limits.

As an analysis of the U.S. women's movement from an Afghani-Pakistani perspective, this trans-historical article reviews the evolution of the women's rights movement in the US during late 19<sup>th</sup>-and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century, and the emergence of contemporary women's rights movement in Pashtun regions of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Stressing the gradual and incomplete nature of the American women's rights movement, this comparative analysis considers how emerging Pashtun women's activists might, like the American women, draw upon elements of their own culture to argue for improved status and greater autonomy. The experience would serve as an inspirational model for the contemporary suppressed Pashtun women stimulating their psychological confidence to stand for their inalienable rights. Furthermore, it would teach them the required techniques on woman question: how to tackle the issues that are going to come across, and how to successfully proceed towards their terminal objectives.

The question arises: why exclusively to rely on the US women's struggle as a roadmap/constitution? The sharp reply is: Though there are countries that granted rights to their women prior to the U.S., the U.S stands tall for the length and intensity of women's struggle. Being nourished in the melting pot of the modern world, the U.S women's struggle reflects the colors of all major global nationalities, cultures, religions, ethnicities,

liberals, and social movements, and offers comprehensive solutions to embryonic women's struggles across the globe. Formally starting from 1848, it continues thus far. In fact, such equivalent is hard to be found anywhere else in the contemporary world.

The constitution of the discussion ranges from personal to political rights. At first place, the analysis explores how the U.S women's struggle formed its ground. After surveying the very reasons, the U.S women's contemporary demands for equality are spotlighted. While refashioning these elements for Pashtun woman, the study is very careful about the fact: what forces were at work that time, and what are the emerging ones in Pashtun regions of Afghanistan and Pakistan at the hour. In addition, concerned scholarships, documentaries, social media, and (national as well as international) women's activists will serve as a medium to robustly tailor the ideals of the U.S women's struggle to the suppressed Pashtun women. Analyzing their struggle on the road of equality, the article categorically teaches that how each single step could be translated by the Pashtun women activists for the concerned disparities keeping in view limitations of time, culture, religion and ethnicity.

For a synopsis of the U.S. women's position by the 1920s the study relies on American historical scholarships. Keeping in mind the limits of documented data about contemporary women's positions in Swat, the study relies on: personal interviews with Malala<sup>1</sup>, her father<sup>2</sup> as well as a few notable indigenous professors and authors; Prof. Dr. Sayed Wiqar Ali Shah's book, *Pukhtane Khaze au da Qam Khidmt [Pashtun Women and Service of the Nation]* (2012); Malala Yousafzai's book, *I am Malala: The Girl who Stood up for Education and was Shot by the Taliban* (2013); Ziauddin Yousafzai's<sup>3</sup> book, *Let Her Fly: A Father's Journey and the Fight for Equality* (2019); Professor Atta-ur-rahman Atta's literary survey, *Da Swat Zana Shaerane [Contemporary Poetesses from Swat]* (running for publication); and the official survey, *Development Profile of Swat District: Situation Analysis & Baseline Surveys for Poverty Reduction through Rural Development in KPK, FATA & Balochistan* by Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF) (2015). The last one appears to be, so far, the only comprehensive and reliable social document about the valley. In addition, the study is infused with the author's personal insights into and experiences of the Pashtun culture and women's issues. He is a native of the tehsil

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<sup>1</sup> Author's interview with Malala Yousafzai (The youngest Nobel Laureate from Swat, Pakistan): August 23, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Author's interview with Ziauddin Yousafzai (The father of Malala Yousafzai, who is the youngest Nobel Laureate from Swat, Pakistan. He has also authored the book, *Let Her Fly: A Father's Journey and the Fight for Equality*, 2019): September 09, 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Since both the authors' (Ziauddin Yousafzai and Malala Yousafzai) have last names "Yousafzai", the author uses their first names for citations to avoid ambiguity.

(division of a district) Matta, which was once the capital and stronghold of the Taliban regime in Swat between 2007 and 2009.<sup>4</sup> To thoroughly represent the valley, the author has informally interviewed men and women from each of seven tehsils—Barikot, Babuzai/Mingora, Kabal, Charbagh, Matta, Khwazakhaila, and Bahrain—regarding women's rights. For the authentication of data, interviewees have been chosen from diverse backgrounds: common people, professors/teachers, a member of the former ruling family, and a few local politicians. The identities of (some) the interviewees are kept secret because of cultural constraints for women and cultural controversies for men.<sup>5</sup>

### The American Context

The struggle for women's equality in America formally began at the 1848 Seneca Fall Convention when "three hundred men and women rallied to the cause of equality for women [and] where Elizabeth Cady Stanton drafted The Seneca Fall Declaration outlining the new movement's ideology and politician strategies".<sup>6</sup> Women fought for many years for an assortment of social, political, economic, and sexual rights. But the significant changes occurred between 1890 and 1920. The help of voluntary associations, institutions, social movements, World War I, and the collective power of women, which had been produced throughout the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century, culminated in the solution of most of their problems<sup>7</sup> by the 1920s.<sup>8</sup>

By the 20<sup>th</sup>-century, American women had grown more organized about developing networks on local, state and national levels.<sup>9</sup> Susan Ware explains that in the 1890s, a "New Woman" appeared on the American scene in education, athletics, reform, and the job market. It seemed that majority of women were gaining a sense of equality for which they would fight

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<sup>4</sup> Malala Yousafzai, *I am Malala: The Girl who Stood up for Education and was Shot by the Taliban*. Ed. Christina

Lamb (Ed.), (London: Little, Brown and Brown, 2013), 111

<sup>5</sup> Author's Interviews with the Locals (interviewees have been chosen from diverse backgrounds in Swat: common people, professors/teachers, a member of the former ruling family, and a few local politicians. The identities of (some) the interviewees are kept secret because of cultural constraints for women and cultural controversies for men), October, November, December, 2017.

<sup>6</sup> Martha Rampton, "Four Waves of Feminism" Pacific University Oregon, Retrieved November 15, 2018 from <https://www.pacificu.edu/magazine/four-waves-feminism>

<sup>7</sup> It is fair to say that while significant progress had been made, and that the lives of many American women had improved—that activists were not yet content, and certainly from the standpoint of later activists, the task was not complete—or there would not have been a later movement reborn in the 1960s. Of course, the extent to which more recent developments in the United States apply elsewhere and how so is an interesting question.

<sup>8</sup> Sara M. Evans, *Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America* (New York: Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1989), 145

<sup>9</sup> Nancy Woloach, *Women and the American Experience* (New York: Knopf, 1984), 292

onwards. The New Woman was the result of many changes that took place in American society, especially during the 19<sup>th</sup>-century. These changes were brought about by wars, waves of immigration, urbanization, industrialization, consumerism, education, the steel horse (railroads), racial and sexual terrorism that affected almost every walk of life in the American society, whose further improvement in the 20<sup>th</sup>-century would change the face of America in the world.<sup>10</sup> Nancy Rosenbloom explains that post World War I economic, political, and cultural changes, as well as military development, had implications for women, including the question of women's equality that remained in the public's eye in the shape of different waves of feminism throughout the 20<sup>th</sup>-century.<sup>11</sup> Sara Evans describes the collapse of Victorianism that had dominated American society until the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century:

Labor unions, women's clubs, settlement houses all represented new public spaces for women, arenas in which they could experiment freely with new ideas and actions. Between 1900 and WWI the old Victorian Code which prescribed strict segregation of the sexes in separate spheres crumbled. The women's movement reached the apex of its political power achieving new laws for pure food, protecting legislation, regulating wages and hours for working women, and children prison and court reforms.<sup>12</sup>

The old ethos was broken and, in the light of their individuality, new models were formed for women's day-to-day lives. Over time, these models evolved into unanimous codes.<sup>13</sup> Young individuals began respecting these codes, breeding modern American life. Once they became intellectually and economically independent, women gradually gained political and social freedom.

In addition, America was struck with the fever of professionalism. The assembly-line concept of Henry Ford's car factory spread quickly throughout the country. Every activity was based on a systematic and planned procedure that revolutionized almost every walk of life. Even volunteer social work was made professional.<sup>14</sup> Ware attests, "In areas such

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<sup>10</sup> Susan Ware, *Modern American women: A Documentary History*, (New York: McGraw Hill Publisher, 2002),3

<sup>11</sup> Nancy J. Rosenbloom, *Women in American History since 1880*, (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), xiii

<sup>12</sup> Evans, *Born for Liberty*,160

<sup>13</sup> Even today, there are contentious issues. While on the one hand, women's right to divorce is unanimously agreed

upon, women's right to an abortion is not. So it varies. Certainly a broad consensus was reached on some issues.

But even the concept of equal pay for equal work, which everyone pays lip service to—and women have made

gains—still does not exist in practice.

<sup>14</sup> Evans, *Born for Liberty*,161, 162

as fertility, wage-force participation, and political activity, their lives were, tentatively, beginning to prefigure patterns that resemble women's lives today".<sup>15</sup> This is not to say that women in the United States have genuine equality today. Clearly, women still are paid only two-thirds of what men make for comparable jobs; and clearly, there are ongoing issues of sexual harassment of women. What I wish to highlight, though, is that American women have come a long way in their determined and ongoing struggle for equal rights.

### The Pashtun Context

Pashtuns are a dominant ethnicity in Afghanistan and one of the major ethnic groups in Pakistan, which is divided into major and minor tribes.<sup>16</sup> At the moment scattered in various countries, Pashtuns are also found in Iran and India. Though the Pashto language is mostly associated with Afghanistan, surprisingly, there are more Pashto speakers in Pakistan. Pashtun culture in Pakistan is a bit different than that of Afghanistan since it has been influenced by other cultures, most specifically by some Indian ways of life. Pashtun culture in Afghanistan, however, with its central Asian influences, is more conservative, especially its attitudes about women.<sup>17</sup>

On both sides of the border, Pashtuns mostly resolve their conflicts through *Jirga*, a tribal council of dignified elderly men, an integral component of Pashtun culture.<sup>18</sup> Pashtun culture in Pakistan, like in Afghanistan, is remarkably diverse in terms of its attitude toward women. It varies in terms of tribal and settled areas, each with its own clan and geographical characteristics. Owing to the considerable diversities within Pashtun culture, its true picture is hard to draw. Some areas are extremely underdeveloped like tribal belts in Pakistan and Afghanistan, whereas some communities, like Qandahar and Kohat, are on the road to modernization. Some, like Peshawar, fulfill the requirements of a modern urbanity. For simplification and authentication of this study, I focus on Swat as a case study for the representation of Pashtun culture, both in Pakistan and Afghanistan. First, Swat hosts Yousafzai tribe: being an enormous tribe, it colors the entire Pashtun culture in terms of its core variations. Secondly, Swat has both rural and urban settings such as the distant valleys and

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<sup>15</sup> Ware, *Modern American women*, 1

<sup>16</sup> Malala, *I am Malala*, 32, 33

<sup>17</sup> Malala, *I am Malala*, 67; Syed Wiqar Ali Shah, *Pukhtane Khaze au da Qam khidmath* [Pastun Women and Service of the Nation], (Peshawar: Bacha Khan Research Center, 2012); Mujib Mahal, & Nadir, Zahra, "No justice, 'no value' for women in a lawless Afghan province" (8 July 2017) Retrieved November 20, 2017 from <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/08/world/asia/afghanistan-women-honor-killings.html>.

<sup>18</sup> Malala, *I am Malala*, 67

Mingora city. Having both rural and urban settings, Swat is the homeland of both the author and Malala, who was born and lived in Mingora, Swat, until she was shot by Talibans on October 9, 2012 for speaking in support of girls' education. At the moment, Yousafzai is an international activist living in Birmingham, England.<sup>19</sup>

Swat valley is located in the north of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province among the towering mountains. With district Chitral, the valley shares its northern border, while district Dir lies in the west, and Malakand Agency faces the district in the south. Districts Shangla and Buner enclose Swat from the East. The Headquarter is Saidu Sharif and the main city is Mingora. Divided into seven divisions (tehsils), the whole area of District Swat is 5337 Square Kilometer (sq. km) with a population of approximately 2,137,000 in 2014.<sup>20</sup> Topographically, Swat is a hilly region at the foothills of the Hindukush mountain range. In addition, the valley hosts the mighty Swat River, snow-capped mountains, lush green valley, forests, numerous orchards of various fruits.<sup>21</sup> Most of the people in Swat are Yousafzai Pashtuns as the last name of Malala indicates. There are some other minor languages, too, like Gujro and Kohistani, etc., but Pashto is the common language of communication, spoken by roughly 93% of the natives.<sup>22</sup>

Until Prince Miangual Jehanzeb removed Swat from its status as a princely state in 1969, the valley was peaceful and attracted tourists from the distant corners of the world for its natural beauty and rich history.<sup>23</sup> With the American attack on Afghanistan, the effects of the "War on Terror" in Afghanistan spread quickly across the border and severely affected the entire Pashtun belt in Pakistan, particularly Swat. The valley fell to the Talibans' regime and the government of Pakistan had to start a military operation against Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in 2009.<sup>24</sup> Although the militants were defeated and their holdings were recovered, terrorist activities are still plaguing the region in the form of targeted killings. Since then, the valley has been unable to restore itself to its former state.<sup>25</sup>

Swat is a region where social and radical diversity rules in every aspect of life, but even so, cultural ties and religious intensity primarily define the value of an individual, especially a female. Lack of authentic

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<sup>19</sup> Malala, *I am Malala*, 290

<sup>20</sup> Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF), *Development Profile of Swat District: Situation Analysis & Baseline*

*Surveys for Poverty Reduction through Rural Development in KPK, FATA & Balochistan*, (AASA Consultant:

Karachi, 2015) Retrieved September 16, 2018 from <http://ppr.org.pk/PDF/District%20Profile%20Swat.pdf>, 4, 6

<sup>21</sup> Malala, *I am Malala*, 18

<sup>22</sup> Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF), *Development Profile of Swat District*, 7

<sup>23</sup> Malala, *I am Malala* 25, 123

<sup>24</sup> Malala, *I am Malala* 137, 190

<sup>25</sup> Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF), *Development Profile of Swat District*, 19

religious insight leads to romanticizing religion that often devolves into religious extremism. In most of the cases of terrorism in the name of religion, local culture influences interpretations of Islam in ways that imprison women in favor of cultural norms, which are brutally unfair, especially for women. Two entirely different ways of life exist for men and women. Where men enjoy freedom, women are constrained by many social and cultural laws that reduce their position to property to be owned.<sup>26</sup> Like their pre-women's rights sisters in the United States<sup>27</sup>, women in Swat experience injustices that affect their freedom of movement, education, marriage consent, domestic responsibilities, jobs, divorce, physical and mental health, property ownership, and political participation.

## 2) U.S. Women by the 1920s

### Education

College doors opened to women during the Civil War and by 1910 forty percent of college students were female. By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century, around 85,000 women were attending college—double the previous records.<sup>28</sup> In 1901, Hare M. Carey argued: knowing the theoretical art of home, college women were better at domestic chores. First the women's college was considered just an educational institution, but later it played a significant role in women's social, economic, and political evolution. The New Woman was actually developed in colleges where students learned about their potential and rights.<sup>29</sup> With the rising number of female students, there was demand for their services in jobs which could argue for opportunities for women so they could fill a preferred role. Even in stores and factories, work was not available for illiterate women. They needed someone with some basic knowledge of math and social dealings. Luckily in the 1870s and 1880s, college education had provided a pool of educated women to meet the professional demands in urban settings. Education was the core source of encouragement for bringing women into the modern scene on equal footing with men in various sectors. Some women rose to high positions in medicine, education, etc. that altered their former perception in the eyes of society and challenged most of the professional hierarchies.

### Social Freedom

Like a commander of forces, Jane Addams led late 19<sup>th</sup>-century American women into a progressive era with promises of a new identity, a

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<sup>26</sup> Malala, *I am Malala*, 13, 66-67, 90

<sup>27</sup> Women in the US did not gain rights in all of these areas simultaneously. It took them considerable time to reach the contemporary status.

<sup>28</sup> Woloch, *Women and the American Experience*, 268, 276

<sup>29</sup> Woloch, *Women and the American Experience*, 278, 279

larger-than-life fate compared to that of being a daughter, wife, or mother. The New Woman was powerful both within and beyond the home. The New Woman obliterated sex-stereotypes, modeling how women could be complete humans. Recognizing their potential and the possibility of a new identity, women assumed leadership roles in many organizations and forums. Sharing feminine goals, they found common ground to support each other. Though the new identity was more challenging, it had the satisfaction of equality. A woman was the same daughter, sister, or mother, but she gained authority, control, status, and influence.<sup>30</sup>

Domestic responsibilities, such as housecleaning and childrearing, were transformed into professional skills. Subjects like children's psychology, home economics, and household engineering could only be performed well by educated women. The National Congress of Mothers, established in 1897, surveyed the causes of domestic problems. Participants learned the required manners, responsibilities, as well as refinement and tolerance for others.<sup>31</sup> The United States society evolved into a consumerist hub and home was the center of it. Their world controlled home and home controlled their world. That was the orbit of their lives, explains Marion Talbot.<sup>32</sup>

### **Personal Freedom**

As the 20<sup>th</sup>-century began, both men and women were seen traveling, working, and socializing almost equally. In cities, young women moved about without being supervised. Women spent a great deal on clothes for night dances. After long work hours, the young were hungry for socializing. Boatloads of money was spent on parties and night club dances. A tendency toward single life rose. Along with economic liberty, social and sexual equality was growing. Morality was replaced with science; ethos (societal norms) gave way to logos (factual entities).<sup>33</sup> These changes affected the lives of married women as much as single women, who started demanding sexual and social equality in matrimony. The phenomenon gave rise to a divorce rate for the first time in U.S. society. William L.O Neill notes that with growing personal independence, the divorce rate skyrocketed to critical dimensions. Comparing the ratio to the 19<sup>th</sup>-century, the divorce rate almost tripled and kept on rising dramatically until the 1930s. Historian Elaine Tyler May writes that most of the divorces were the result of husbands' domestic violence or failure to support the family.<sup>34 35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Woloch, *Women and the American Experience*, 270, 271

<sup>31</sup> Woloch, *Women and the American Experience*, 301.

<sup>32</sup> Woloch, *Women and the American Experience*, 295

<sup>33</sup> Evans, *Women and the American Experience*, 156, 160, 161, 164

<sup>34</sup> So women have freedom to escape abuse, but also freedom to simply leave (as does the husband). No-fault

The hegemony of heterosexuality was deeply explored, unlocking some secrets of sexual life. Contraception and volunteer motherhood became imperative factors. Women were now able to lead their lives without sacrificing their sexuality for children at the early stages of their lives. Ignoring conventional information related to domestic and sexual life, they concentrated on scientific discoveries about biological differences between men and women. The scientific approach towards life challenged many traditional ideas about sex and marriage. Scientific attitudes about home revolutionized the "home" with scientific management and professional skills.<sup>36</sup> Historian Daniel Scott Smith writes: "women acquired an increasing power over sex and reproduction within marriage and experienced a great increase of power and autonomy within the family".<sup>37</sup> As a result, birth rates plummeted both in urban and rural areas. Twenty-five percent of women who married between 1880 and 1910 produced only two children. Further, in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century, they avoided giving birth in the first five years of marriage and built their lives intentionally, living ten years longer than women in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century. Historian Linda Gordon named it "volunteer motherhood," which later came to be known as "the right to body".<sup>38</sup>

### **Economic Independence**

During the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century women were spreading across nearly every profession, standing side by side with men. World War I provided extensive and diverse job opportunities for women for the first time in U.S history, quadrupling women's numbers in jobs.<sup>39</sup> In 1870, 1.7 million women worked, but in forty years the number reached seven million.<sup>41</sup> By 1910, one out of five women (8 million) were working at jobs outside the home. According to the 1910 census, their number had tripled since the 1870s, having many jobs once held by men and even some jobs that men had not experienced previously.<sup>42</sup>

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divorce comes later, which increases freedom but also destabilizes families. This is a complicated legacy, and one which conservatives who resist change fear.

<sup>35</sup> Woloch, *Women and the American Experience*, 273, 274

<sup>36</sup> Woloch, *Women and the American Experience*, 161-162

<sup>37</sup> Woloch, *Women and the American Experience*, 271

<sup>38</sup> Woloch, *Women and the American Experience*, 271

<sup>39</sup> Sending so many men to war opened the door (and WW2 would do it again). Of course the opportunities

diminished but did not vanish entirely when the men returned postwar.

<sup>40</sup> Woloch, *Women and the American Experience*, 227-248

<sup>41</sup> Ware, *Modern American women* 47

<sup>42</sup> Woloch, *Women and the American Experience*, 220.

### **Job Opportunities**

Early in the 20<sup>th</sup>-century women gained limited economic freedom. They could easily join nursing, teaching, library work, or social work which men declined because they were able to find better opportunities with the expanding American economy.<sup>43</sup> In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century, more women were employed in offices, stores, and schools, but their labor was cheap, both in private and government sectors. Between 1870 and 1900, the number of saleswomen multiplied by ten. Still the world of business was a new venture for them. Men who wanted to enter business were considered ambitious, while women with the same desire were thought to be clean and neat.<sup>44</sup> In clerical and sales work, women were rarely hired in the 1870s, but by 1900 their number rose to thirty-three percent and in the 1920s, women were in the majority.<sup>45</sup> Like sales work, nursing was also falling into the hands of women, reaching a peak by 1900, when nine out of ten nurses were women.<sup>46</sup> For women, numerous jobs opportunities were created in various sectors like writing, newspapers, magazines, social work, education, offices, hospitals, and factories.<sup>47</sup> Once marginalized, now women appeared at the heart of vocations in which they had never been seen before.<sup>48</sup>

### **Struggle for the Right to Vote**

The Women's Suffrage movement lasted almost fifty years—the longest and harshest struggle of American history for an amendment which later proved a stable base for the coming waves of feminism.<sup>49</sup> William O'Neill points out that World War I was highly useful for the suffragist movement. It encouraged a huge number of women to help in volunteer work that grew into a force for the movement. The volunteer work impressed the government that, at that time, sympathized with women.<sup>50</sup> By the end of World War 1, Women's Suffrage was a colossal movement with membership in the millions.

Carrie Chapman Catt, who gained the presidential seat of the National American Women Suffrage Association (NAWSA) in 1915, pushed systematically for the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment. Evans says, "Her plan worked like a clock taking only four years instead of six, [which] Catt had predicted".<sup>51</sup> Her strategy earned the confidence of President Wilson, who

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<sup>43</sup> Woloch, *Women and the American Experience*, 283.

<sup>44</sup> Woloch, *Women and the American Experience*, 246-246

<sup>45</sup> Evans, *Born for Liberty*, 134

<sup>46</sup> Woloch, *Women and the American Experience*, 224

<sup>47</sup> However, some of those (social work, nursing, secretarial work) became feminized and were shunned by men.

<sup>48</sup> Woloch, *Women and the American Experience*, 283-285

<sup>49</sup> Woloch, *Women and the American Experience*, 235

<sup>50</sup> Woloch, *Women and the American Experience*, 252

<sup>51</sup> Evans, *Born for Liberty*, 170

recommended to the Senate to pass the amendment for women's suffrage. President Wilson also appeared at the NAWSA convention in September 1916, announcing his support for Women's Suffrage: "I have not come to ask you to be patient, because you have been, but I have come to congratulate you that here has been a force behind you that will beyond any peradventure be triumphant and for which you can afford a little while to wait".<sup>52</sup> He forwarded the request to the House of Representatives, which passed the Women Suffrage Amendment on the January 10, 1918. The Senate gave its approval in June 1919 and the bill was finally ratified by thirty-six states by August 26, 1920.<sup>53</sup>

By 1920, American women had the right to vote, but it was late in the global context. Many countries had already given women the right to vote: New Zealand (1893); Australia (1902); Finland (1906); Norway (1913); Denmark (1915); Canada (1917); Austria, Germany, Poland, Russia (1918) and Netherlands (1919). During the titanic struggle for women's voting rights, American society had evolved to such an extent that the right to vote in 1920 seemed a kind of degradation to American women.<sup>54</sup> Carrie Chapman Catt wrote in 1926: "It was a continuous seemingly, endless chain of activity. Young suffragists who helped forge the last links of the chain were not born when it began. Old feminists who forged the links were dead when it ended".<sup>55</sup> Historian William Chafe said that though the American women took too long to gain the right to vote, it had a significant impact on their lives. Now, women had a legal position from which to challenge other aspects of inequality. New laws were passed to protect women's rights in light of the new legislation. Congress passed the Shepherd Tower Act of 1921 to safeguard maternal education and child health care. In addition, both major parties opened their doors for women in their committees.<sup>56</sup> Evans explores how the social, political, and economic life of early 20<sup>th</sup>-century's American women had drastically transformed after attaining the right to vote:

Women learnt to create institutions to demand that government accept some responsibility for community life whether in the form of pure drinking water or of libraries and schools. Many of the leaders of the suffrage movement believed that once women had the right to vote they would as individuals, express these female values through the electoral process and there would be no more need for collective organization. . . . From Suffragist to citizen, from housewife to house economist,

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<sup>52</sup> Evans, *Born for Liberty*, 169

<sup>53</sup> Evans, *Born for Liberty*, 353

<sup>54</sup> Ware, *Modern American women*, 94

<sup>55</sup> Woloch, *Women and the American Experience*, 356

<sup>56</sup> Woloch, *Women and the American Experience*, 356

from volunteer to social worker, from silence and euphemism to Freudian psychology, in each case modernity brought both gains and losses eroding the female community that had flourished in Victorian America.<sup>57</sup>

### Settlements

Besides NAWSA, Jane Adams' Hull House also played a noteworthy role in the organization of American women. Like a big brother, says Jane Addams, the Hull House protected American women against problems of the day. It worked as a pressure group shielding women's social, economic, and political rights. At Hull House, under Jane's guidance, local mothers came to know about nutrition and household management. Hull House Women's Club extended its guidance throughout the neighborhood and out to the suburbs. By 1895, Hull House had inspired many college graduates who wanted to serve the cause as residents giving a new and stable source of active participation on behalf of women's issues.<sup>58</sup> Hull House grew into a community dominated by educated women who created their own terminology (e.g., "Head resident," "dear sister," "Lady Jane") and identity opposed to "the domestic claim." Later on, it produced figures like Julia Winthrop, the head of the federal Children's Bureau; Florence Kelley, the head of the national Consumers' League; and Alice Hamilton who founded the field of industrial medicine and taught at Harvard. All resided at Hull House from 1897 to 1907. Grace and Edith Abbot, two graduate sisters whose mother went to Rockford, also joined the house. Edith taught there, while Grace became the head of the Immigrants' Protective League and later took Julia Lathrop's position at Children's Bureau. By the 1920s, the alumnae of Hull House scattered all over the country with notable positions. Three years after founding Hull House, Jane Addams pronounced herself the grandmother of American Settlements. By the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century, settlement houses had become a notable profession and Jane was the leading figure. Jane Addams reached the height of women's political equality when she seconded Theodore Roosevelt for the Presidential nomination at the Progressive Party. She was hailed throughout the country for this courageous and famed stance.<sup>59</sup> In the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century, other women's settlements, inspired by Hull House, motivated many legislations such as The Children's Bureau in the Labor Department and the Women's Bureau. These two bureaus served children's and women's rights in the federal government. All these factors were important to strengthen and refine women's argument that they deserved equal rights.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Evans, *Born for Liberty*, 172-173

<sup>58</sup> Woloch, *Women and the American Experience*, 262-263

<sup>59</sup> Woloch, *Women and the American Experience*, 264-266

<sup>60</sup> Woloch, *Women and the American Experience*, 301-303

### Associations

There were many unions, but the prominent club movement was the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), formed in 1873 and led by Annie Wittenmyer. WCTU rose to fame in 1879 when it was taken over by Frances Willard who, in the next two decades, turned the table on the union, making it one of the powerful sources of American women's rights. By 1890, WCTU had 160,000 members and enlarged its scope, dealing with all problems that were caused by men.<sup>61</sup> The American Federation of Labor (AFL) did not welcome women as their skills were not considered "professional" or "useful." But by the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century more waves of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe added new energy to the women's movement and they enrolled in many prominent federations and unions.<sup>62</sup> By 1892, when the General Federation Women Club (GFWC) came into being, there were more than 500 affiliated clubs and 100,000 members, and by World War I over a million. These associations and unions had a profound political impact for American women. These women were far stronger than their former sisters and had a clear awareness of their rights and duties. With the power of unity, they were able to pressure their employers, state officials, legislators, owners, industrialists, and business tycoons for their rights.<sup>63</sup>

### 3) The Contemporary Position of Pashtun Women

#### The Birth of a Pashtun Girl

The story of injustices commences with a Pashtun woman at the time of her birth, which is commonly taken as a bad omen for the family. A girl's gender haunts her with an inferior position at different stages of life. Contrarily, the birth of a boy enhances the significance of a family; and the event is considered a pride for the entire family/clan. Boys are preferred over girls for their masculine roles in family feuds, economy, property inheritance, and cultural acceptability.<sup>64</sup> Malala explains this situation, describing how her mother usually seemed more excited for her brother, Khushal, and favored him over her as the other women of the land do.<sup>65</sup> Research provides evidence that even the local literature has no place for women. In his dissertation, *Proverbs and Patriarchy: Analysis of Linguistic Sexism and Gender Relations Among the Pashtuns of Pakistan*, Noor Sanauddin explores extreme gender bias against women in Pashtun proverbs. For example, "A home that does not have a male child should be

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<sup>61</sup> Woloch, *Women and the American Experience*, 287, 288

<sup>62</sup> Evans, *Born for Liberty*, 157, 158

<sup>63</sup> Evans, *Born for Liberty*, 290

<sup>64</sup> Shah, *Pukhtane Khaze au da Qam khidmath [Pashtun Women and Service of the Nation]*, 2012

<sup>65</sup> Malala, *I am Malala*, 20

demolished"; or "A girl's father is never at rest"; or "The earth and Pashtun woman do [should] not speak"; or "Keep women under your hand . . ."; or "Ruined is the man who listens to the advice of women"; or "A women goes seven foot ahead of the devil"<sup>66</sup> Malala begins her book with the story of her birth and how people, other than her father, reacted:

When I was born, people in our village commiserated with my mother and nobody congratulated my father. . . . My father, Ziauddin, is different from Pashtun men. . . . He told people, "I know there is something different about this child." He even asked his friends to throw dried fruits, sweets and coins into my cradles, something we usually do for boys. . . . My parents had not held one [*Woma*]<sup>67</sup> for me because they could not afford the goat and rice needed to feed the guests, and my grandfather would not help them out because I was not a boy.<sup>68</sup>

Apart from Malala, who replicated the same comments in her interview,<sup>69</sup> an interviewer explained: "We love daughters but when we look at their status in Pashtun culture, we desire for sons."<sup>70</sup> Professor Dr. Abaseen Yousafzai<sup>71</sup> and Ziauddin Yousafzai<sup>72</sup> also attest the aforementioned view.

## Education

The issue of women's education is crucial because most of Pashtun women's problems stem from illiteracy. Pashtun women with a feminist awareness, which comes directly from education, could be in a better position to fight for their rights<sup>73</sup>.<sup>74</sup> Unfortunately, in Swat "literacy rates

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<sup>66</sup> Noor Sanauddin, *Proverbs and Patriarchy: Analysis of Linguistic Sexism and Gender Relations among the Pashtuns of Pakistan*. (2015) Retrieved August 10, 2019 from. <http://theses.gla.ac.uk/6243/1/2015SanauddinPhD.pdf>, 308, 309

<sup>67</sup> *Woma* means seven (07) in Pashtu. On the seventh day of the child's (mostly baby boy) birth, the family invites the relatives and celebrates the event with the sacrifice of a goat or sheep, which is mix-cooked with rice in a large cauldron.

<sup>68</sup> Malala, *I am Malala*, 13-14, 58

<sup>69</sup> Author's Interview with Malala

<sup>70</sup> Author Interviews with the Locals.

<sup>71</sup> Author's Interview with Professor Dr. Abassen Yousafzai (Chair of Khyber Union Hall, Islamia College University Peshawar). July 16, 2019.

<sup>72</sup> Author' Interview with Ziauddin Yousafzai

<sup>73</sup> Pashtun culture/elders not only fear education for women but also deem it unnecessary because they have narrow

domestic roles for women in their minds.

<sup>74</sup> Ziauddin Yousafzai, *Let Her Fly: A Father's Journey and the Fight for Equality*, (London: WH Allen, an imprint

are 50 percent for the overall population, with 73 percent for males and 27 percent for females during the year 2012-13." Around 38 percent of girls fail to register in schools.<sup>75</sup> A female interviewee said: "We need educated women to serve as doctors and lawyers because a woman can better understand a woman's problems in a place like Swat."<sup>76</sup> During her interview, Malala, who was shot for the very cause, repeatedly mentioned the grave concern of women's education in the valley.<sup>77</sup> Her father, Ziauddin Yousafzai categorically endorsed his daughter's stance in his interview.<sup>78</sup>

### Lack of Awareness

The lack of Pashtun women's awareness of their plight and a sense of hopelessness that anything will change makes them vulnerable to their male masters. Being ignorant and uneducated, women have blindly accepted the cruel cultural laws, which run almost the opposite to those devised by religion<sup>79</sup> and state.<sup>80</sup> Even Malala sheds light on the issue by describing her mother's way of life, which was thoroughly shadowed by the local understanding of the role of women. Pashtun women fail to develop family planning; they produce many children; and they tend to decline modern medical techniques in favor of traditional ones.<sup>81</sup> Two local professors, including Prof. Dr. Abaseen Yousafzai<sup>82</sup>, Prof. Dr. Sayed Wiqar Ali Shah<sup>83</sup>, and Ziauddin Yousafzai<sup>84</sup>, agree that only awareness, which is obtained through education, can liberate the Pashtun women from their miseries.

### Marriage Consent

With some degree of softening in recent years, women's consent in marriage has been the most critical issue in Pashtun culture since the genesis of Pashtun society. Although both males and females have limited say in marriage, which is usually arranged by families, boys can reject the

of Ebury Publishing, 2019

<sup>75</sup> Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF), *Development Profile of Swat District*, 10

<sup>76</sup> Author's Interviews with the Locals.

<sup>77</sup> Author's Interview with Malala Yousafzai

<sup>78</sup> Author's Interview with Ziauddin Yousafzai

<sup>79</sup> The Holy Quran: Sora Nesa

<sup>80</sup> The 1973-Constitution of Pakistan

<sup>81</sup> Malala, *I am Malala*, 53

<sup>82</sup> Author's Interview with the Prof. Dr. Abaseen Yousafzai

<sup>83</sup> Author's Interview/Discussion with Prof. Dr. Sayed Wiqar Ali Shah (Dean of Social Sciences, and Director of

Area Study Center for Africa, North and South America Quaid-i-Azam University Islamabad). Being the direct

mentor, the nature of this query was discussion and question based. It has taken place a number of times at a

number of events.

<sup>84</sup> Author's Interview with Ziauddin Yousafzai

arrangement.<sup>85</sup> Girls are only informed; they have no right to refuse. It is beyond thinking for a girl to have a say about her life partner. A woman's defiance is seen as an act of immorality;<sup>86</sup> and sometimes she is silenced with eternal sleep.<sup>87</sup> On behalf of her Pashtun sisters, Malala laments this code of Pashtun culture:

I am very proud to be a Pashtun, but sometimes I think our code of conduct has a lot to answer for, particularly where the treatment of women is concerned. . . . There was a beautiful fifteen-year-old girl called Seema. Everyone knew she was in love with a boy. . . . In our society for a girl to flirt with any man brings shame on the family, though it's alright for the man. We were told she had committed suicide, but we later discovered her own family had poisoned her. . . . When I complained these things to my father he had told me that life was harder for women in Afghanistan.<sup>88</sup>

Malala has drawn a true picture of Pashtun society, where people have zero tolerance for a woman's "infidelity (flirting)." If a family fails to put an infidel woman to death, the family is publicly shamed and their social status plummets. Such a transgression may be held against them for centuries. One interviewee explains it this way: "we know it is wrong but, at the moment, we cannot defy cultural norms like these as we have to live in this society."<sup>89</sup>

### **Economic Dependence**

As in other Pashtun regions, women in Swat are economically dependent on men and bear phenomenal mental stress.<sup>90</sup> Like Charlotte Perkins Gilman, who depicted women being driven mad by male dominance, Malala sees that Pashtun women claim economic dependency at the price of liberty. This reduces their importance in men's eyes who usually take their rights for granted.<sup>91</sup> Unlike some educated women, a majority of the illiterate women who took part in the interviews are of the opinion that

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<sup>85</sup> Malala, *I am Malala*, 21

<sup>86</sup> Shah, *Pukhtane Khaze au da Qam khidmath [Pashtun Women and Service of the Nation]*

<sup>87</sup> Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF), *Development Profile of Swat District*

<sup>88</sup> Malala, *I am Malala*, 66-97

<sup>89</sup> Author's Interviews with the Locals.

<sup>90</sup> Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF), *Development Profile of Swat District*, 25-26

<sup>91</sup> Malala, *I am Malala*, 116

their rightful place is home, whereas earning is the natural responsibility of men.<sup>92</sup>

### **Jobs Opportunities**

There are limited job opportunities for women in Swat. They are allowed to work in homelike spheres that they find most often in education and health. In addition, a negligible number of women earn an income by tailoring or making handicrafts at home. Women of extremely poor families work as housemaids to support their families.<sup>93</sup> According to Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement (PSLM) 2012-13, "only 0.29 percent women are working as wage employees in the district".<sup>94</sup>

### **Property Ownership**

Pashtun women are done the worst injustices in property inheritance. Both the law<sup>95</sup> and religion<sup>96</sup> assure a woman's inheritance, but the Pashtun culture strongly opposes it. A woman even fails to take her property with the help of law because she fears being ostracized by her own family. Pashtun women are even cheated of their *mahar*, a mandatory payment—usually a piece of property—paid by the groom to the bride.<sup>97</sup> A few women interviewees do not think that women should take their share in property, while some want their share but fear the consequences.<sup>98</sup>

### **Domestic Responsibilities**

Like other Pashtun regions, the role of women in Swat begins and ends in the domestic sphere. At a very young age, girls are forced to learn all the technicalities of managing a house. They are advised to look after the younger babies in the family in order to train for their future domestic and maternal obligations. Confined to roles mandated by patriarchy, women are unfairly discriminated against in Swat.<sup>99</sup> Malala expresses her grief at the plight of Pashtun women caged in the domestic sphere, "I was a girl in a land where rifles are fired in celebration of a son, while daughters are hidden away behind a curtain, their role in life simply to prepare food and give birth to children." She exemplifies the phenomenon by describing her mother's way of life, which she thinks was not fair.<sup>100</sup> In the interview, Malala emphasized how education is necessary to raise women's awareness that

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<sup>92</sup> Author's Interviews with the Locals.

<sup>93</sup> Malala, *I am Malala*, 82

<sup>94</sup> Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF), *Development Profile of Swat District*, 25

<sup>95</sup> The 1973-Constitution of Pakistan

<sup>96</sup> The Holy Quran: Sora Nesa

<sup>97</sup> Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF), *Development Profile of Swat District*, 27

<sup>98</sup> Author's Interviews with the Locals.

<sup>99</sup> Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF), *Development Profile of Swat District*, 25

<sup>100</sup> Malala, *I am Malala*, 13, 166, 305

there may be possibilities for them beyond the domestic sphere.<sup>101</sup> Apart from a few educated men, the majority of men and women interviewees are shocked when they are asked about the domestic responsibilities because they consider it the legal duty of women. One of the female interviewees puts it this way—"If we do not work at home, where else we are supposed to work then?"<sup>102</sup>

### **Domestic Say**

"Women toil, while men decide." That's how one interviewee describes Pashtun gender roles in Swat.<sup>103</sup> The situation in educated families may be different, but on the larger scene, the society is patriarchal from the core.<sup>104</sup> Women may have limited say in some feminine issues such the management of households, but still a man's verdict is considered final.<sup>105</sup> Men mostly share their serious problems with other men because sharing personal problems with a woman is considered weakness on the part of Pashtun men.<sup>106</sup> Local interviewees and Malala agree that, in Pashtun culture, men dominate women's opinions.<sup>107</sup>

### **Domestic Violence**

In Pashtun culture in Swat, domestic violence is the most frequent of any other crimes. Up to 70 percent of cases reported at the police stations are related to domestic violence triggered by honor issues.<sup>108</sup> In some cases, domestic violence is considered justified. Women who bear domestic violence silently are considered pious and well bred. Often a woman's own family advises her to swallow wordlessly whatever happens to her because it is the law of the land. Pashtuns normally have an extended family system in which a woman is under the jurisdiction of every male in the family.<sup>109</sup> Here the responses of the interviewees are mixed. A rural woman, whose daughter was recently shot by her son-in-law, says, "Domestic violence is the test that most of the Pashtun women have to stand as the price of their marriage."<sup>110</sup>

### **Divorce**

Divorce is a social stain in Pashtun society; it plagues both the life of a male and a female. Having an upper hand, a man can manage to carve a

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<sup>101</sup> Author's Interview with Malala

<sup>102</sup> Author's Interviews with the Locals.

<sup>103</sup> Author's Interviews with the Locals.

<sup>104</sup> Sanauddin, *Proverbs and Patriarchy*

<sup>105</sup> Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF), *Development Profile of Swat District*, 25

<sup>106</sup> Malala, *I am Malala* 22

<sup>107</sup> Author's Interviews with Malala and the Locals

<sup>108</sup> Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF), *Development Profile of Swat District*, 24

<sup>109</sup> Shah, *Pukhtane Khaze au da Qam khidmath [Pashtun Women and Service of the Nation]*

<sup>110</sup> Author's Interviews with the Locals.

role for himself in the society or remarry, but a female is doomed with the tag of divorcee, which is a taint against her character until the last breath of her life. Another elderly rural woman encapsulates the whole dilemma in a few words: "A Pashtun woman leaves her house twice, once when she gets married and second when she dies."<sup>111</sup>

### Freedom of Movement

There may be variations in the degree of Pashtun women's freedom of movement, but the majority of women in Swat are confined in cultural shackles. Women and girls are not meant to go out. Consistent with *purdah*, the practice of female seclusion or covering, if a woman has to participate in some cultural activity or seek medical help or go shopping, she must wear an *abaya* (in Pashtu: *burqa*) that covers her from head to toe as well as be accompanied by a male of any age.<sup>112</sup> Envyng the freedom of her brothers in Swat, Malala complains about these social constraints:

While boys and men could roam freely about town, my mother and I could not go out without a male relative to accompany us, even if it was a five-year-old boy! This was the tradition. I had decided very early I would not be like that. My father always said, "Malala will be free as a bird."...But, as I watched my brothers running across the roof, flying their kites and skillfully flicking the strings back and forth to cut each other's down. I wondered how free a daughter could ever be.<sup>113</sup>

During her interview, Malala protested again the lack of female mobility in Swat.<sup>114</sup> A local politician says, "We will provide our ladies with freedom of movement. Unfortunately, neither the Pashtun traditions favor it nor the contemporary society has any tolerance for it which may result in some mishaps."<sup>115</sup>

### Political Participation

For a Pashtun woman political participation is highly objectionable. The society does not allow it. The political realm is a masculine department, just as 'home' is a feminine one. Women have the right to vote, but they do not have permission to use that right. Neither do they have any awareness of it. Limited number of seats are reserved for women in the provincial and national assembly. In the majority of places, there is almost zero female turnout in elections. In March 2012, a women-led *jirga*, or tribal council, was established to boost women's awareness and political participation. It is

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<sup>111</sup> Author's Interview with the Locals.

<sup>112</sup> Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF), *Development Profile of Swat District*, 25

<sup>113</sup> Malala, *I am Malala*, 26

<sup>114</sup> Author's Interview with Malala

<sup>115</sup> Author's interview with the Locals.

comprised of 25 members headed by Tabassum Adnan, with an additional 500 trained women activists.<sup>116</sup> Malala grieves over the lack of Pashtun women's participation in politics.<sup>117</sup> An elderly rural man was shocked when he was asked about women's participation in political activities and remarks ironically: "If women start participating in political activities, men will step in doing domestic chores."<sup>118</sup>

#### **4) How the Early 20<sup>th</sup>-Century American Women's Struggle can Influence the Struggle of Contemporary Pashtun Women**

##### **Education**

American women's independent status in the 1920s was the fruit of education whose seeds were sown generously after the Civil War. By 1910, forty percent of college students were female, and by the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century, the number doubled.<sup>119</sup> Comparatively, women in Swat are lagging behind in education. The female literacy rate is only 27% in the overall 50% literacy of the valley.<sup>120</sup> Early marriage, as a rule of the land, shrinks the number of schoolgirls who go on to colleges and universities. Compared to boys, only a few girls make their way to higher education. In the arena of women's education, Pashtun culture may take direct inspiration from the American experience including other socially developed countries: like New Zealand, Denmark, Sweden, Turkey, etc. The education of girls and women will surely transform every angle of Pashtun society because most of the problems for women seem to be the product of a rigidly-imposed patriarchy enabled by illiteracy. Recently, the government, social media, and some foreign NGOs have shown interest in the cause. With the rising ratio of education for men, as the statistics indicate, some change can be seen in the attitude of some Pashtun men about the education of women. Malala and her father, Ziauddin also wish to transform the level of education, particularly for women, in the region with the help of the international community.<sup>121</sup>

##### **Social Awareness**

The status of U.S. women at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century was made possible by enhanced awareness, which women won through their struggle for social, educational, economic, and political rights. Being educated and independent, they trusted scientific explanations instead of

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<sup>116</sup> Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF), *Development Profile of Swat District*, 21-22, 26

<sup>117</sup> Author's Interview with Malala.

<sup>118</sup> Author's Interviews with the Locals.

<sup>119</sup> Woloch, *Women and the American Experience*, 276

<sup>120</sup> Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF), *Development Profile of Swat District*, 10

<sup>121</sup> Author's Interviews with Malala and Ziauddin

traditional ways, and were able to develop their own decisions.<sup>122</sup> They introduced the concept of “volunteer motherhood” in the light of which they produced fewer children, with family planning improving their health and life span.<sup>123</sup> The picture in Swat is the polar opposite. Mostly illiterate, women in Pashtun regions lack awareness about their basic rights that turns out to be a major source of their exploitation because they have, in fact, rights of which they are ignorant. Once they know about their rights and duties, Pashtun women’s domination and exploitation by men in many spheres will be mostly diluted. Some local NGOs like *LASOONA*, *HUJRA* and *KARAWAN* are active, but have yet to transform the degree of ignorance that exists among women (and men) in the valley.<sup>124</sup> In her interview, Malala explains how she intends to enlighten the Pashtun women with the gift of education, which will systematically bring awareness.<sup>125</sup>

### Marriage Consent

Marriage is another integral component of society in which there is a glaring disparity between American society in the 1920s and Pashtun society in the 2010s. Having personal liberty, American women were generally in control of their personal lives regardless of societal pressure.<sup>126</sup> They remained at nearly equal footing with their husbands, both in domestic and marital issues, even in parting ways.<sup>127</sup> Unlike marriage for U.S women, marriage in Pashtun culture has been a very fraught issue for women. Unlike men, women are not allowed to openly express their desires in the selection of their life partners. If they ever do, it is taken for “infidelity” for which the cultural laws are unforgiving, even though the religion and the constitution grant them this right.<sup>128</sup> Once married, whatever the circumstances are, it becomes very hard for women to divorce. Although Islam and the constitution insure a woman's right to *Khula* (a woman's appeal for divorce), divorce remains a social stigma.<sup>129</sup> Therefore divorce is exercised by a negligible number of women. With a rising number of marital issues, growing awareness of female rights, and a surge both in men and women's education a degree of elasticity has been witnessed in women's consent in marriage.

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<sup>122</sup> Evans, *Born for Liberty*, 161-162

<sup>123</sup> Woloch, *Women and the American Experience*, 273

<sup>124</sup> Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF), *Development Profile of Swat District*, 25, 31

<sup>125</sup> Author's interview with Malala

<sup>126</sup> Evans, *Born for Liberty*, 160-161

<sup>127</sup> Woloch, *Women and the American Experience*, 273

<sup>128</sup> Malala, *I am Malala*, 21, 66, 67

<sup>129</sup> The 1973-Constitution of Pakistan, The Holy Quran, and Hadits.

### **Economic Independence**

In the 20<sup>th</sup>-century, credit for the liberation of U.S. women also goes to their economic independence. A woman economically dependent upon her husband cannot have full freedom. Women in Swat, however, are mostly dependent on men for their expenses. They have limited job opportunities in education and health, etc. In the same vein, they are cheated of their inheritance despite the fact that both religion and the law of the land guarantee it.<sup>130</sup> As Malala says, financial self-sufficiency could help lift women from misery to their due place in the Pashtun society.<sup>131</sup> Recently, women's entry into some jobs, like law and banking, and some cases of women's receipt of their inheritance may support the claim that Pashtun culture is beginning to transform.

### **Domestic Sphere**

One of the biggest achievements of U.S. women in the 1920s was moving from the domestic into the public realm, transforming domestic duties and child raising into professional skills. The National Congress of Mothers in 1897 "traced the roots of crime and disease to 'inefficient homes,' and the settlement worker gained access to those homes," teaching the participants "cleanliness, orderliness, refinement, manners, culture, responsibility, and citizenship".<sup>132</sup> Both men and women were encouraged to share domestic responsibilities. In Swat, like other Pashtun regions in Pakistan and Afghanistan, the role of the majority of women is still traditional. Childrearing and domestic responsibilities are believed to be the natural duties of women. The patriarchal society limits roles for women, and those roles take place in the home.<sup>133</sup> In terms of gender equity relating to domestic responsibilities, so far there is no hope to be seen because the society is not at a stage to demand that men bear this burden with women. Mentioning this very fact in her book, Malala also implied in her interview that she yearns to weaken domestic clutches on women in Swat in favor of taking on leading roles in the society.<sup>134</sup> So far, Pashtun women are mostly deprived of that possibility.

### **Freedom of Movement**

Unlike Pashtun women in the 2010s, U.S. women in the 1920s enjoyed freedom of movement. The traditional jurisdiction of women being

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<sup>130</sup> Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF), *Development Profile of Swat District*, 25, 27

<sup>131</sup> Malala, *I am Malala*, 116

<sup>132</sup> Woloch, *Women and the American Experience*, 301

<sup>133</sup> Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF), *Development Profile of Swat District*, 25

<sup>134</sup> Malala, *I am Malala*, 52; author's interview with Malala.

relegated to home, the site of domesticity, had already been challenged.<sup>135</sup> Recognizing their potential with the help of a newly acquired identity, American women assumed starring roles and were able to roam without being supervised.<sup>136</sup> Secure freedom of movement is a dire need of Pashtun women who are, by and large, leading lives with strident cultural restrictions.<sup>137</sup> Malala, the most visible Pashtun activist with international support, is like a 20<sup>th</sup>-century Jane Addams, protesting against unjust Pashtun restrictions on women in her talks, her book, and her personal interview. Education and social media are contributing to the rising awareness of Pashtun women; and the result is that some of these gendered cultural constraints are beginning to soften.

### Political Participation

Nobody knows better the worth of political rights than the American women who struggled for half a century to earn them. First, they fought for the right to vote. Then with this right, they fought battles for many other rights.<sup>138</sup> They had associations like NAWSA, clubs like WCTU, settlements like Hull House, and leaders like Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Carrie Chapman Catt, and Frances Willard who awakened the political consciousness of American women.<sup>139</sup> In contrast, Pashtun women have the legal right to vote already, but they do not have the right to use it. In addition, there is a shortage of inspiring leaders, clubs, associations, and settlements to educate them. There is only a women-led *jirga* that so far does not seem effective.<sup>140</sup> Musarat Ahmadzeb and Ayesha Syed are the current women Members of National Assembly on the reserved seats from Swat. Although Malala is trying her level best, unfortunately, due to some local propaganda that attempts to discredit her, Pashtun women in Swat have not been as responsive to her as the international community has been.<sup>141</sup>

### 5) Literary Voices

Although Pashtun women's voices are suppressed, there are still some brave women who have dared to write literature. A literary survey,

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<sup>135</sup> Plenty of people still thought women belonged in the home even as women challenged that. It was neither

absolute suppression or absolute freedom.

<sup>136</sup> Evans, *Born for Liberty*, 161

<sup>137</sup> Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF), *Development Profile of Swat District*, 25

<sup>138</sup> In this period women gained many rights before they gained the right to vote. It is also true that the right to vote led to other changes later.

<sup>139</sup> Woloch, *Women and the American Experience*, 355

<sup>140</sup> Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF), *Development Profile of Swat District*, 21-22

<sup>141</sup> Malala, *I am Malala*, 298

"*Da Swat Zana Shaerane [Contemporary Poetesses from Swat]*"<sup>142</sup> by Attaurahman Atta, an Assistant Professor of Pashto Language at Jehanzeb Post Graduate College Swat and a PhD candidate at Pashtu Academy, the University of Peshawar, lists eight local poetesses among whom some openly speak about the cultural constraints of Pashtun women. Sana Latiff worries for her father's societal honor in her poetry and intends to sacrifice her personal desires and passions for it. Revealing the psychological oppression of Pashtun women, she lets her lover know in one of her poems that distance will safeguard both their lives and love. Likewise Maryam, who calls herself Farwa Yousafzai, speaks of her romantic idealism, while strongly opposing extremism. Afsana, who writes with a pen name, tells the story of her passion for writing. She was on the verge of being killed by her husband for writing poetry when she was saved by the intervention of her sons, even though her literary pieces were burnt in an oven. Sameena Qadir, who calls herself Meena, has written a collection of poems, *Spezale Jazbe [Pure Intentions]*.<sup>143</sup> In her poem "Bewasi" [*Helplessness or Forlornness*], she critiques the devaluation of women, claiming, ironically, that she has no grudge against the Pashtun society for usurping her rights of education, movement, love, and marriage because she is a woman, which is a sin in itself. It could be argued that the entire collection reflects the suppression of Pashtun women. Asma Ikhlās, an undergraduate student of Pashtu Literature at Pashtu Department, Islamia College University Peshawar, is also a contemporary poetess from Swat, who, through her romantic poetry, is openly challenging the shackles of Pashtun patriarchy.

A Pashtun novelist from Mardan, Pakistan, Hasina Gul is the author of the novel, *Malka* (2011), which means "queen." Malka, the protagonist of the novel, loses trust in the institution of marriage because of her sister's abusive husband and failed marriage. She seems to develop lesbian ties with Khaista, her only friend with whom she remains in relationship until her death. After Khaista's death, Malka goes mad and soon dies.<sup>144</sup> These women writers, who are read locally, raise their voices against the oppression of Pashtun women just as Louisa May Alcott, Kate Chopin, and Zora Neale Hurston did a hundred years ago. Some of them simply identify; others critique; and still others offer alternative models of female-identified community. Khaled Hosseini in *Dear Zari: The Secret Lives of the Women of Afghanistan* (2012), and Aisha Ahmad and Roger Boase in *The Pastun Tales from the Pakistan-Afghan Frontier* (2008) piece together many such fictional stories that certify the suppression of Pashtun Women on both sides

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<sup>142</sup> Attaur-Rehman Atta, *Da Swat Zanana Shaerane [Contemporary Poetesses from Swat]*, running for

publication at Pashtu Academy, The University of Peshawar KP.

<sup>143</sup> Sameena Qadir, *Spezale Jazbe [Pure Intentions]*, (Peshawar: College Department KP, 2016).

<sup>144</sup> Hasina Gull, *Malka [Queen]*, (Mardan: Maraka Publication, 2011)

of the border— in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Due to illiteracy there are as yet few feminist activists like late Asma Jilani Jahangir (1952-2018), Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy (1978-), and Reham Khan (1973-) in Pakistan, but in the Islamic diaspora there are many.<sup>145</sup> There are also some organizations, like The Global Women's Project, The Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID), and UN Women, that are trying to help Pashtun women in their nascent struggle for equal rights both in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

## 6) Conclusion

There are many controversies and differences of opinion among the Pashtuns in Pakistan and Afghanistan regarding the true picture of their culture. I present a precise focus on women's issues in Swat. I have ignored some controversial topics like *swara* (a process through which *jirga* gives a girl to another family/clan to resolve a feud), the practice of which has nearly disappeared in Pashtun culture.<sup>146</sup> Of course, women's issues are entangled with every thread of the fabric of society, but I focus on a few strands of this fabric. This comprehensive analysis reviews substantial differences between the social, personal, economic, and political rights of U.S. women in the 1920s and Pashtun women in the 2010s. Except for the right to vote, almost nothing sounds similar between the U.S. and Pashtun women except the list of important issues. Surprisingly, the position of Pashtun women has grown more repressed though this is due to the rise of religious extremism in the late 20<sup>th</sup>-century (while American women benefited from social upheaval due to industrialization and war, the opposite has been the case for Pakistani Pushtun women). Pashtun women had more liberty in the 1950s.<sup>147</sup> Until Pashtun men like myself and Malala's father Ziauddin Yousafzai, are willing to join women to examine inequity, the pace of reform for Pashtun women will be slow. Education both for men and women seems to be the sole remedy for the problems of Pashtun women.

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<sup>145</sup> for obvious reasons, the majority of feminists seem to be from Iran or those who immigrated to the U.S. or Canada. Here is a brief list: Leila Ahmad (1940-) an Egyptian American writer on Islamic feminism and a professor of women's studies in religion at Harvard Divinity School; Shadi Sadr (1974-), an Iranian lawyer; Elalih Koulaei (1956-) an Iranian politician; Nourshir Amhadi Khorasani (1969-), an Iranian activist; Shahla Sherket (1956-) an Iranian journalist; Fatema Mernissa (1940-2015), from Morocco, an Islamic feminist; Irshad Manji (1968-), now a Canadian who has written *The Trouble with Islam Today* (2004) and *Allah, Liberty, and Love* (2010); Taslima Nasrin (1962-) a Bangladesh feminist activist; Nida Mahmood (1990-) is described as a "Pakistan-based first feminist English poet"; and Amir Jamal, assistant professor in social work at St. Thomas University in Canada.

<sup>146</sup> Malala, *I am Malala*, 67

<sup>147</sup> Khurshid Khan, "Plight of Women in Swat" *DAWN (DAWN - Editorial; December 31, 2008)*. Retrieved

January 12, 2009 from <https://www.dawn.com/news/1071861>.

The story of the U.S. women's struggle could inspire their Pashtun sisters, who are beginning their battle for self-determination and rights. One of the prime activists, Malala Yousafzai, targets women's rights as part of a revolt against female inequality in Pashtun society. In the beginning of her book, she vows: "To all the girls who have faced injustice and been silenced. Together we will be heard".<sup>148</sup> In this way, activists like Malala and writers like Sana Latiff, Farwa Yousafzai, Sameena Qadir, Asma Ikhlas, and Hasina Gul have the potential to introduce multifaceted scenarios of women's struggle from across the world, in particular from the U.S., to spark a steady revolution for the rightful place of Pashtun women in our society. Women's issues are global concerns across time and distance and these are interlinked struggles.

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<sup>148</sup> Malala, *I am Malala V*

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