



## For Whom Will the “Gulai-Nargis” Bloom this Spring in the **Swat Valley**

Dedicated to the  
**Girls of Swat**  
who may never go  
to school again!

from their sister  
who was fortunate  
enough to be educated.

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**T**oday, the 15th January 2009 civilisation, democracy, human rights, rule of law, equality, justice and equity stand defeated. Today, the Government and people of Pakistan have succumbed to a disparate group of faceless, semi-invisible individuals hiding behind an opaque mask of religion and declared all girls' education as outside the pale of Islam. 'Iqra'[Read], a mandatory injunction in the Qur'an for every Muslim male and female, has been reduced to a meaningless word trampled under the feet of worldly gods speaking in God's name. The great and glorious of the state of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, in a state of complete denial whine and whimper as the state recedes under their very eyes..... For today, the parallel 'taliban' the only government with any writ in Swat has declared all girls' schools closed forever.

But who cares for the Swat Pukhtuns from the back of beyond. Let them shut down girls' schools and chop up heads, hang them from poles and tree tops. After all, Islamabad is thriving, we have a democratically elected President, Prime Minister and Parliament. Swat and FATA are very far away and only become significant when foreign masters are in town and demand action. After agonising, weeping, brooding and making angry conversations with whoever cared to listen, I decided to share these thoughts with anyone who may wish to read and capture the tormented soul of a Swati woman sitting continents away from her beloved homeland. Is the pain greater when one is far away from home and loved ones. Does everyone living in the 'diaspora' experience a sinking feeling at the sound of a ringing telephone in the early hours of the morning, fearing some horrible news awaiting at the other end of the telephone. Does everyone sit glued to the television set in the anxious hope of more news of Swat, FATA and the country.

How long before we will say: enough is enough and rise, speak and act. How much more suffering before we declare emphatically that we refuse to be harassed and silenced any longer and demand answers for the wrong doings meted out to us. How many more humans will have to be slaughtered, before we stand up and say NO. When will we shout from the rooftops of Mingora, Saidu, Kabal, Matta, Sangota, Manglawar, huprial, Dewlai, Madyan, Bahrein, Kalam: stop your underhand, hypocritical games, blowing hot and cold, killing us in the name of protecting us when all the while what is being protected, is power and wealth of a few and destruction of the people of Swat. Go and play your foul game elsewhere and leave us in peace. Stop our genocide.

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But, who will listen to the pleas of the traumatised souls that are my compatriots: impoverished beyond belief materially, emotionally and physically. Not the evil Machiavellis of today who cast the net of violence over unguarded people going about their daily business. Not those perched in the superior location of the corridors of power and wealth who are in a state of denial, simply looking the other way and celebrating their power and opportunity to humiliate the people of Pakistan by decorating the perpetrators of their destruction with medals.

It is that time of year in Swat when the harsh winter breeze cascades from the peaks of majestic snow capped mountains spreading its icy cold wings throughout the valley. As a child, I had bittersweet sentiments for these freezing cold winds as they coincided with my winter vacations from the Sacred Heart Convent in Lahore. Just when the sun would start shining every morning and I would want to play outside, the freezing winds would make me want to huddle indoors by the fire. One of my aunts [and later my mother-in-law] once told me why those far away mountains I saw were always to remain covered with snow... this is called the *gunaangaar ghar* [sinful mountain]... it is under a curse and destined to carry the burden of a snowy cap....Turning my head to the other side of the valley, I would see *illum*, another grand mountain lying between my home valley and that of Buner. This mountain held a more positive image in popular imagination as a saying goes in Pukhto: May you become as tall in stature as the *illum* mountain.

I now wonder whether it was us Swatis as well as that far away mountain carrying its 'cursed' load of snow all year round and visible only on clear sunny days from Mingora, that may have been under a curse. Why else has tragedy of the present proportion struck Swat and her people, making a reported 5 lakh people homeless, rendering as many others homeless and thousands dead or missing. What merited this punishment and terror, is a complex and mysterious saga details of which we may never fully comprehend. The stark reality is that hundreds of thousands of Swatis who have been peaceful, hospitable, people now live a tormented life, inside as well as outside Swat and see their beloved homeland being destroyed by the histrionics of Machiavellian power play.

I know that at this tragic stage of our existence as God and human forsaken Swatis, it is all too easy to fall into the trap of recalling a romanticised past.... Yet for us forgotten and forsaken people, any respite must come from recalling our past and building on it towards a future. I cannot help but see,

albeit in a mist and haze of tearful eyes and broken heart [but not broken spirit] images of those not so long ago times, when droves of tourists from home and abroad, would ply through the Malakand Pass and make their way to Swat. We never used the word 'tourist' for these people coming from 'khakata' ['down' country]; everyone used the word 'meylma' [guest] for these visitors and holiday makers, film production teams, honeymooners and families proudly showing off the 'Switzerland of the East' to their children who would then go back to school in Lahore, Rawalpindi, Karachi, indeed all parts of Pakistan, and narrate tales of the gushing waters of the river Swat, the tall pine clad mountains, the narrow dangerous roads, the clear sapphire blue waters of mahodand [a lake beyond Kalam], the 'white palace' in Marghozaar where the tall mountains met...

I recollect those early years of my life when we had no piped water in the family home presided over by my grandparents, and when it was common every evening, before sunset, for women to walk through discreet side alleys, towards the 'gudar' and 'gaaga' to fill their manglee [earthen ware vessels] with fresh, cold drinking water for their families. Images of dozens of women in their chaddars artfully balancing manglee on their heads and often one in their armpit walking single file down narrow lanes against the backdrop of a glorious golden setting sun on the horizon are still fresh in my memory. We children were not allowed to distract this daily ritual but on the rare occasion when my cousins and I would cajole our mothers and aunts into letting us accompany those assigned to fetch water, I would wonder why all the men

suddenly seemed to 'shy' off and turn their heads towards the walls of the lanes, creating a 'private-public' space for women. The male public sphere of this small village-like town would transform itself for a short while into female space with manglee-holding women gracefully navigating the streets and narrow alleyways. The same principle applied to the gudar where the family laundry was done. This truly was a picnic where one could simply rollick about in the green fields, tap your feet in the cold water of the streams, play hide and seek behind a bush, greedily pick the blackberries that grew along the stream, and the occasional scream when pricked unceremoniously by



the thorns in the blackberry bush. There was the even rarer treat in the autumn when wild peas were in bloom and we could cunningly pick a few pods as we sauntered through the fields on our way to the water. I must emphasise that this was a regular all-women excursion and the only male intruder would be at midday when a male helper would bring the much-awaited lunch.

At about this time of year, in a few weeks perhaps, when the sun starts shining with a bit more courage and looks down on this icy cold valley, the gulai-nargis [narcissus] and ghaantol [wild tulips] will take heart and peep out of the muddy soil on the slopes of the adjoining mountains. Scores of women will be

awaiting these first signs of the turning weather in the hope that they can go saaba-picking [edible green clover leaves, chives and a host of other saag type vegetation which is the staple food of most of the population]. Travellers along the road from Mingora towards Peshawar will find the familiar sight of young boys and girls holding up bouquets of narcissus and wild tulips for sale.

Is it possible that the few thousands of militants are so superior in arms and training that the 7th largest army in the world is unable to out manoeuvre them. Are the government structures and institutions so weak that access lines to arms and ammunition cannot be cut off.

That is how I remember life growing up as a young girl in the Swat valley. My husband went to a co-education school in the town and his female classmates are grandmothers now. Sixty years ago in Swat, girls and boys went to primary school together; secondary and higher secondary schools for girls were full to the brim from where hundreds of young women ventured forth to the colleges and university in Peshawar and beyond. My induction as the first woman cabinet minister in the NWFP government in 1999 was widely hailed and men and women alike shared in what they saw as a collective pride and recognition of one of their own.

So when, why and how did the present nightmare unfold for us unfortunate Swatis. When did this serene, hospitable valley get chosen as the venue of game playing individuals and groups, local, national, regional and international. What was/is the game plan, input and output and what is the desired result that perpetrators of the scheme aspire to achieve. Why choose Swat as opposed to adjoining territories with less accessibility to the outside world and governmental infrastructure. How true is it that so-called militant religious extremists are entirely

responsible for all the horror, terror, death and destruction of Swat and Swatis and so-called 'progressive' democratically elected government is innocent and beyond reproach. How true is it seeds of the present situation were sown by institutions responsible for upholding and protecting the national interest in 1994 when Sufi Mohammad took Swat and the entire governmental machinery hostage. The 'black turbans', as they were called simply emerged as if from nowhere and before anyone could take a deep breath, had spread themselves across the valley. The government of the time gave them some crumbs in the form of the Nizam-i-adl regulation 1994, re-named judges and courts by using the names Qazi, Ilaqa Qazi etc., and assigned supposedly Shari'a literate muavin or advisers to assist the Qazi in administration of justice to make sure it was Shari'a compliant. People of the Malakand division as it was then called, had a choice to use the 'Islamic law' or the 'regular' law of the country. It is no secret that apart from a few women daring to challenge their male relatives to obtain their inheritance by using Islamic law, all and sundry stuck to the civil and criminal law of the country.

Some time later, dissatisfied noises started being heard regarding unsatisfactory nifaz/promulgation of Sharia, but it actually turned out that some of the muavineen, or 'Shari'a conversant advisers, were angling for a raise in their salaries. This demand was of course met, as that was the easy way out and then forgot all about the underlying million dollar question: Was/Is there a popular demand for Shari'a promulgation in the region; how is this to be gauged; what is the problem with existing offerings and what/who is the underlying, simmering problem and issue's.

Why is it that this demand emanates not from more urbanised centres of Swat including Mingora, Saidu etc., but from outlying, rural areas where class divisions are more pronounced and landed class unpopular among the general population. Surely, if the demand was the result of delays in court and administration of justice generally, ought the people from the urban centres not likely to be the ones more affected thus proponents of the demand for Shari'a.....

Leaving the above critical question on the back burner to simmer and exacerbate, we now come to another governance and neglect issue in Swat.

**But the critical questions of all, that Swatis are asking themselves and the world: Who are these 'people' who have captured their land, terrorised them to death, why and for what end and purpose.**

This is the issue of 'custom-chor' vehicles that have flooded the market. Cars, jeeps etc are available for unbelievable paltry sums creating avenues for all sorts of activities outside the pervue of the law. Why was this not dealt with and nipped in the bud asap when the problem was first spotted. Receding and abdicating state control and remit are terms that come readily to mind. The question I pose here is: Was the state apparatus unaware of this and the wider, serious implications for government and governance not to mention the lost revenue and financial fallout. Is it rocket science to decipher the fact that when you give an inch, a yard is what is generally being conceded. The signal given to those who may have had intentions of violent adventures in the area would be quite clear: go ahead and do what you want; there is very little to stop you.

Deep in the forests of Swat, it was being reported that when government officials went on inspection tours of the area, they were stopped at the foot of the mountains where the thick pine forests started. The local population also reported periodic 'earthquake-like' happenings as if a bomb has gone off; they were spotting unfamiliar people on the roads, were generally confused but as unsuspecting people focussing on earning two square meals for their families, never thought more of it. Neither did they know who to say all this strange goings on to; who would listen to poor villagers in the first place....

Hospital staff in the several hospitals and health facilities recollect numerous men and women patients who 'did not look like us', spoke a very strong sounding language, the men had 'long hair and sort of chinky eyes', etc etc., These sightings started about two summers ago but no governmental, agency picked this up, or did they....

Is it possible that the few thousands of militants are so superior in arms and training that the 7th largest army in the world is unable to out manoeuvre them. Are the government structures and institutions so weak that access lines to arms and ammunition cannot be cut off. But the critical questions of all, that Swatis are asking themselves and the world: Who are these 'people' who have captured their land, terrorised them to death, why and for what end and purpose. As citizens of this country, Swatis demand answers to these questions and for the government to take responsibility for leaving them without security, succour and sustenance.

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## **Dedicated to the Children and People of Swat...**

### **To SWAT & FATA With Love and Tears**

To SWAT and FATA with Love and Tears  
From your fellow citizens, who CARE  
To the Girls and Women  
Who suffer the denial of IQRA (education) and existence  
To ALL of us who must respond to the killing distress  
The Karbala is in our backyards  
When will we defend OURSELVES?  
Mend our spirit and our flesh  
RISE as time runs out,  
For us, and our generations to come  
..We want OUR Pakistan back  
Restoring the majesty of its four seasons, and  
Where ALL flowers are allowed to bloom

**January 16, 2009**

**Baela R. Jamil**

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